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George Henry Townsend

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

NOT AN IMPOSTOR.

BY

AN ENGLISH CRITIC.

G. H. Townsend
(Bacon the [illegible]
reply to [illegible]

"The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo."
LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST.

LONDON:
G. ROUTLEDGE & CO. FARRINGDON STREET;
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1857.

[*The Author reserves the Right of Translation.*]

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1857

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TO

THE ENGLISH PEOPLE,

AS

The Best Guardians of those Rich Legacies of Thought

BEQUEATHED BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

TO

ALL POSTERITY,

THIS VINDICATION

OF

THE CHARACTER OF THE MAN AND OF THE

FAME OF THE POET

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE.

The Author has endeavoured to collect within the compass of a small volume the historical documents and the testimonies of the poet's contemporaries, by which the claim of William Shakespeare to the authorship of the six-and-thirty plays, published in the folio edition of 1623, is clearly established. His title is confirmed by such a mass of evidence, that many readers who have not investigated the matter will wonder how it could ever have been called in question. They must not forget that the province of some critics is to scatter doubts broad-cast over the literature of a country; and that weeds always spread more rapidly than wholesome plants and sweet-smelling flowers. To vindicate the character of our mighty Shakespeare, thus wantonly assailed, has indeed been a labour of love; and if this little volume should have the effect of kindling in any

heart a deeper reverence for the memory of William Shakespeare, or giving to a single reader a fairer idea of his extraordinary superiority over all other poets, ancient as well as modern, the author will not have written in vain.

LONDON,
January 26th, 1857.

"TRUTH may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that showeth best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle, that showeth best in varied lights. A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure. Doth any man doubt, that if there were taken out of men's minds, vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations, as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves? One of the fathers, in great severity, called poesy *vinum dæmonum*, because it filleth the imagination, and yet it is but with the shadow of a lie. But it is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in and settleth in it, that doth the hurt, such as we spake of before. But howsoever these things are thus in men's depraved judgments and affections, yet truth, which only doth judge itself, teacheth that the inquiry of truth, which is the love-making, or wooing of it—the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it—and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it—is the sovereign good of human nature."—FRANCIS BACON.

SHAKESPEARE NOT AN IMPOSTOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE NATURE OF THE CHARGE.

"Then what do those poor *Souls* which nothing get?
Or what do those which get, and cannot keep?
Like buckets Bottomless, which all out-let,
Those *Souls*, for want of Exercise, must sleep."

SIR JOHN DAVIES.

"ASSUREDLY that criticism of Shakespeare will alone be genial which is reverential. An Englishman, who without reverence—a proud and affectionate reverence—can utter the name of William Shakespeare, stands disqualified for the office of critic." Such are the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the most learned and acute of Shakesperian students and commentators; while "Shakespeare is a vile impostor," is the cry of the latest luminary of the age.

To the eternal disgrace of English literature,—if the effusion to which we refer can be classed amongst its productions,—a pamphlet has recently appeared, in every way calculated "to fright the isle from its propriety." It contains charges against the two most illustrious names upon our list of authors, which, if proven, must cover their names with infamy of the deepest dye, and consign their memories to eternal execration. The accusations are made by one William Henry Smith,* with-

* Throughout this vindication of our immortal bard we have been

out, as we shall see in the course of this investigation, one shadow of proof; and for such an offender there can be neither consideration nor respect. On light and unjustifiable grounds, seduced, as it would appear, by the reveries of a disordered fancy, he has brought grave charges against William Shakespeare and Francis Bacon, which he has not attempted to establish by one particle of evidence. The desire of notoriety, not of honourable distinction, has become quite a passion with many of the new lights of the age; and we presume that the aspirant for literary honours, whose wanton onslaught upon the memory of Shakespeare must excite the indignation of all that great man's affectionate admirers, cares little by what means he obtains his end, or gratifies his uneasy ambition.

In the rambling sentences in which his accusations are couched, he certainly does hint at proofs; but in any case Mr. William Henry Smith has acted unfairly both towards the mighty dead whom he maligns, and the British public which he would delude. Even if he were in possession of proofs to substantiate his grave charges, these ought most decidedly to have been produced, when the charges were made; and if he can adduce nothing but his own disordered fancies to support his theories, they should never have been given to the world. The fame of the illustrious dead is the most precious memorial of the past; it is not only the source of all our glory, but it is the fountain of future greatness, and acts as an incentive to others, impelling them to the performance of noble and heroic actions. Yet this sacred heirloom is not secure from the attacks of those who, to speak most charitably of their conduct, can have but a feeble notion of its real importance.

The author of the present defence of Shakespeare—

very careful to give this purblind critic's name in full. It is fit that the public should know which member of the large family of the Smiths it is that has stepped out of his legitimate sphere to assail the character of William Shakespeare.

if defence can be needed against such a charge—has waited anxiously for some time, hoping that a champion better qualified to undertake the vindication of the mighty dead, now wantonly and wilfully assailed, would have come to the rescue. None have taken up the gauntlet so deliberately thrown down before us ; and he cannot suffer it to be said, that when, in the nineteenth century, dark suspicions were breathed against the character of William Shakespeare, no Englishman could be found to hurl them back at the head of the detractor. The platitudes of M. Ponsard, who drivelled the other day at Paris, about "the divine Williams," as only self-satisfied but incompetent critics can do, were too contemptible to require notice ; but Mr. William Henry Smith, though evidently a critic of the same class, cannot be allowed to perpetrate his follies without rebuke.

The French critic may be excused for not fully understanding the character or appreciating the genius of Shakespeare ; but the Englishman, who, at this advanced stage of Shakespearian investigation, has no adequate idea of either the one or the other, can plead nothing save wilful blindness, or hopeless obtuseness, in extenuation of his extraordinary ignorance. No inducement should lead such a one to set himself up as a teacher ; and many people will doubtless assert that an offender of this class and calibre is beneath notice ; and that no well-educated man, acquainted either with the dramas of Shakespeare, the writings of Bacon, or the literary history of the Elizabethan period, can possibly be misled by his shallow speculations.

This is, to a certain extent, true ; but we must not forget that Shakespeare has become a beloved and honoured guest in the cottages and hamlets of the land ; that his name is dear to thousands of the humble and the lowly, who have neither the means nor the leisure which will admit of their diving deeply into his history, and to investigate accusations brought against him ; and

for such persons in particular the author is now induced to take up his pen. Cheap literature has introduced the works of our great dramatist to all classes of his countrymen; it has opened unimagined mines of intellectual wealth to the enraptured gaze of once neglected sections of the community, and it has sunk shafts through the grim haunts of ignorance and crime, letting in the glorious rays of wisdom and intelligence. Wherever Englishmen go, they carry with them their English Bible and their English Shakespeare; and neither of these can we suffer to be lightly spoken of or undervalued. The former we defend on account of its divine origin, as the source of all our hopes; the latter, as the most precious of uninspired writings.

Moreover, it is fit and proper that the high priests of literature should be protected from irreverent and wanton assault. Let these, his new admirers in the lower, but not, on that account, less honourable, ranks of life, know that the Shakespeare whose magic power holds them spell-bound in amazement and admiration, is not the greatest literary impostor the world ever saw. Nor is it only the humbler class of readers that may be misled by such vagaries. Even the acute and sagacious editor of that deservedly popular periodical, *Notes and Queries*, falls into the snare, and, apparently without reflecting upon the infamy that must for ever rest upon the names of Bacon and Shakespeare, supposing that Mr. William Henry Smith were able to substantiate his charges, says, with reference to this pamphlet,—"It is a *Letter to the Earl of Ellesmere*, suggesting whether the plays attributed to Shakespeare were not in reality written by Bacon. The author has overlooked two points: one, the fact that his theory had been anticipated by an American writer; the second, one which certainly tells strongly in favour of his theory, and which has been on several occasions alluded to in these columns, namely, the very remarkable circumstance that nowhere in the writings of Shakspeare

is any allusion to Bacon to be met with; nor in the writings of the great philosopher is there the slightest reference to his wonderful and most philosophic contemporary."* We are willing to allow Mr. William Henry Smith to make the most of this admission, but how it can possibly prove, either directly or indirectly, that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, or Shakespeare Bacon, we are at a loss to conceive. The former must have gone considerably out of his way to drag the greatest of modern philosophers into his dramas; and, as regards Bacon, he may have felt an influence which he did not choose to acknowledge. Such strange admissions from authorities highly qualified to give an opinion, and in every way entitled to respect, render it expedient that the question should be set at rest without delay, and that it should be clearly shown not only that Mr. William Henry Smith's arguments are untenable—that they are altogether without foundation,—but that it is absolutely and utterly impossible, in the teeth of the evidence that we actually possess, that any one but William Shakespeare could have written the dramas that have been for more than two centuries attributed to him. Many years' earnest and affectionate study of the works of Shakespeare have served to increase the author's esteem and admiration for the great and commanding superiority of his genius over that of all other gifted men, and he has no hesitation in asserting, what he is prepared to prove; namely, that Shakespeare merits that general tribute of affection and admiration which he has won.

It is a most remarkable fact, that every fresh particular brought to light concerning his career becomes an additional witness in his favour. The more we learn of Shakespeare, the higher does our admiration rise; the nearer we get at the truth, the fairer does the truth appear. Every advance made in our inves-

* Notes and Queries, Second Series, No. 42. Notes on Books, p. 320.

tigations serves to remove a blemish from his portrait; and were it not that fresh calumnies are invented as the old ones disappear, a defence of our great national bard would be at this moment unnecessary. Vain is it for this last assailant of the reputation of the mighty dead to plead the controversy that has arisen respecting the authorship of the Letters of Junius at his excuse for starting this question. Junius was a writer who did not wish to be known, and the public were, naturally enough, anxious to strip off the mask; but we have no reason for entertaining the slightest doubt that Shakespeare was the author of at least the majority of the dramas that bear his name.

The writers who laboured to establish the identity of Junius endeavoured to clear up a mystery, in the solution of which all Englishmen had an interest. He was an anonymous censor, who gloried in his secret, boasting that he would carry it with him to the grave; and he thus threw out a challenge to every member of the community. It was a fair game at hide-and-seek between him and the public; the former did his best to evade detection, the latter to unearth the literary fox. Circumstances pointed at various times to different persons; and even when a mistake was made, no great harm was done. A temperate denial from some one able to speak with certainty upon the matter, or the silent yet not less certain testimony of evidence called circumstantial, turned pursuit in another direction; and if to this hour the authorship of those Letters, that created a wonderful sensation at the time of publication, and have excited so many keen encounters of wit, and provoked such animated controversies at intervals during the last fifty years, remains to a certain extent a mystery, the memories of the dead lie under no grievous imputations on that account. An anonymous author is one thing; and a man who appropriates the reputation that does not belong to him another.

If the dramas of Shakespeare were really written by Bacon, the former is the greatest of all impostors, and the latter the basest of deceivers. Mr. William Henry Smith seeks to consign these men to eternal degradation; he would have us believe that the lives of both were a series of palpable deceits, an acted lie. To the hour that Mr. William Henry Smith poured forth his dark suspicions, no critic, commentator, nor editor, had ventured to hint that William Shakespeare was not the author of the dramas published under his name. Certain crude and disconnected pieces, that have been foisted upon him by interested publishers, were indeed rejected by the most discerning critics; but the question, as it now stands, deals not with particular dramas, but the whole collection. The English people are asked to subscribe to the preposterous theory, that the poet, whom, of all others, they admire and respect, is no poet at all, and that for two centuries, students and commentators have been groping in the dark, and erecting a monument to a man who practised one of the vilest deceptions of which human nature is capable; and who added to the degradation of being a base-minded upstart, that of seeking to appropriate to himself the fame and the honour which belonged by right to another.

What the public in general think of the matter, will be seen from the following letter, published in the *Illustrated London News*, of January 10, under the signature of "John Bull:"—

"I won't have Bacon. I will have my own cherished 'Will.' I have borne a great deal, and never changed my faith. I have seen him chipped, mauled, befribbled and overdone. I have seen upholsterers and classic managers cloud his glories in fustian and explanations. I have heard shouts against his anachronisms, and anathemas against his want of the unities and ignorance of Greek; but never thought that an Englishman, and a 'Smith,' would try to prove that he was a swindler, a

thief, a jackdaw, and died, in the odour of sanctity, the pilferer of Bacon. Have we no literary police—no pen jealous of the honour of our 'immortal bard?' Oh, for an hour with the giant Christopher North! Oh, for some swashing blows of his rhetorical cudgel to crush this fungus! I know the pestilent vapour will pass away, and the steady glories of Will. Shakspeare blaze forth again; but in the mean time we shiver under the passing cloud. First, a College of Monks wrote Shikspur; now it's the jurisprudist Bacon. Why not Sir Walter Raleigh? Why not Queen Elizabeth herself? But, as I began, we won't have 'Bacon!'"

CHAPTER II.

THE ASSAILANTS OF GENIUS, AND THE VARIOUS METHODS BY WHICH THEY CARRY ON THE ASSAULT.

"Ah! how the poor world is pestered with such water-flies; diminutives of nature."—TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

HAPPILY, in the quaint language of Sir Thomas Browne, this is "a fallacy that dwells not in a cloud, and needs not the sun to scatter it;" and before proceeding to refute the same, we may glance for a moment at the two principal classes by which the reputations of the good and the gifted have been invariably assailed, as well as at the manner in which their hostility has been manifested. These classes are the over-learned, who account for everything upon theory, and the hopelessly ignorant, whose very souls shudder at every kind of mental superiority. They are the assailants of genius, in whatever form it may develop itself; and to which of these the latest detractor of Shakespeare belongs, or whether he is to be regarded as the founder of a new school of cavillers, my readers may decide for themselves. The former get entangled in the cobwebs which they weave from their own brains; the latter vent their rage upon everything calculated to give grace and dignity to our fallen nature.

We cannot, therefore, wonder that our most illustrious author—if not, indeed, the master-spirit of all time—should incur their fierce resentment. Meaner intellects have at least one consolation; if they cannot create, they may succeed in destroying. He who would build up some glorious edifice of learning and wisdom, must be possessed of great mental endowments; industry, which

no amount of toil can weary; and patience and long-suffering, bestowed upon few out of the many millions of human beings who play their parts upon the theatre of this world; but for the work of destruction, none of these qualifications are required.

The veriest tyro can assault a time-honoured institution or bespatter with mud the noblest monument of genius. Indeed the lower the position such a detractor occupies in the intellectual scale, the better fitted will he be for the performance of his unseemly task. Dirty work requires its peculiar instrument; and none more readily assail the literary fame of others than those who have no literary reputation of their own to lose. The leveller has generally but little to boast of: he would not be so anxious to pull down and destroy, did he possess anything worthy of defence. It is the same in literature as in the common-weal: he who has possessions will carefully uphold the rights of property.

To create requires the skill of the master, but to overthrow that which other men by patient labour, unwearied diligence, and great ability, have erected, is an easier task. Thus the authors of those sublime productions of genius, which have formed the delight and wonder of successive generations, have in all ages been the subjects of the most envenomed and the vilest attacks. Nor have these attacks been confined to the works of man,—those coming directly from God, and stamped with the impress of His holiness, have been subjected to similar treatment. As the literature of a country is its most enduring possession, its productions of course come in for the principal share of the hostility of such narrow-minded despoilers. The greatest treasures of universal literature are, it will, we imagine, be admitted without dispute, the Bible, the works of Homer, and the dramas of William Shakespeare.

The assault upon the Scriptures has been waged in various ways. While some have sought to suppress them, to make them a sealed book, and thus to rob man

of his best treasure, others have endeavoured to explain them away altogether. Toland and his imitators would account for miracles and mysteries in a perfectly natural manner; while Sir William Drummond calmly endeavoured to prove that the Hebrew Scriptures were a collection of astronomical emblems, and sought to identify the patriarchs with the twelve signs of the zodiac.*

Vain were it for us to undertake the task of exposing all the different methods in which, both in bygone and even in more modern times, the sacred writings have been assailed. One authority, incredulous in all things save his own superior ability and discernment, assures us, with a gravity ill becoming such ribaldry, that they are a collection of fables; another cannot admit that they are inspired; while a third will point out the particular portions that are alone worthy of reception. All such reasoners lack that humility which is the faithful attendant of true wisdom: theirs is the presumption of overweening vanity, or the arrogance of ignorance as hopeless as it is profound. In fact some people seem to fancy they have a charter, liberal as the wind, to assail anything that comes in their way, no matter how sacred it may be. Yet while mercilessly severe against the productions of the great thinkers and workers of the past, they treat the pigmies of to-day with a ridiculous and totally uncalled-for leniency.

Thus almost every department of literature is crowded with shallow pretenders. True, we have noble-minded men, toiling for the benefit of their fellows, and adding lustre to our literary annals; but these are not the popular writers of the day. Those whose names will stand out as beacons a century hence, are not most followed and

* See the "Œdipus Judaicus" by Sir W. Drummond, a work at first printed for private circulation only, and therefore not published. It was very admirably dealt with in a Satire by the Rev. G. Townsend, D.D., who, adopting Sir W. Drummond's line of argument, contended that the signs of the zodiac represented the twelve Cæsars.

best remunerated now. Take down what popular author you please from the shelf, and examine his right and title to celebrity. Look narrowly into his style, weigh his sentences, break them up, parse them, dissect them: you might as well hunt for a grain of gold-dust in a cart-load of sand, as hope to find anything that will repay you for your search. The composition will not bear inspection; the sentences will be found to consist of a strange medley of foreign terms and absurd conceits. To distort a figure, and to thrust a word into any position but the one which it might legitimately occupy, is their highest aim. A healthy, manly, nervous Shakesperian diction would be so much Greek to these word-mongers, who have stocked our vocabulary with slang terms, and introduced the jargon of the stable into the drawing-room.*

Their productions are false in form, execrable in spirit, and weak in expression. "I do not mean by expression," to adopt the language of Coleridge, "the mere choice of words, but the whole dress, fashion, and arrangement of a thought." If their diction be vile, the views and opinions they seek to propagate are calculated to shake the very foundations of society; to scatter the seeds of enmity among all classes of the community. Their hand is against everything holy and good; in their sight the most sacred institutions of the land are an abomination. They delight in caricaturing Nature, but they never strive to represent her or to interpret her oracles. They cannot sit in humble meekness at her feet, studying her form, and seeking to be illumined by her blessed light: their object is not to adorn, but to deface everything they touch.†

* Numerous proofs of these assertions may be found by any person willing to undertake the search amongst the productions of our popular authors. Specimens and illustrations of these errors shall, if leisure and opportunity permit, be given in a future work.

† While these sheets are passing through the press, the writer's attention has been directed to some articles of great merit in the *Saturday Review*, exposing some of the evils to which he alludes.

Their conclusions are as erroneous as their style is faulty. They mutilate and mangle every subject, to raise a smile, or to create what they term a sensation. To Truth they pay no homage; indeed, they have long since turned their backs upon her. The simple beauty of her appearance can have no attractions for those who love to feast their eyes upon frippery and finery; who prefer gaudy tinsel to solid ore.

Exactly the same kind of process is in operation upon the English stage. With one or two honourable exceptions, our most popular performers act in precisely the same style as our popular authors write. Those are most applauded who have the trick of flattering the follies of the hour; who, by their vulgarity, have won the goodwill of the vulgar. To exaggerate and distort is their vocation. Mountebanks have succeeded the Kembles, Kean, Liston, and the bright spirits of a better period. People talk of the decline of the drama, as if that were to be attributed solely to a scarcity of good dramatists. Where shall we find actors capable of interpreting the master-pieces of tragedy and comedy, in which our literature is so rich? When the accomplished artist makes his bow to a discriminating audience, we feel assured that he will not be at a loss for something to represent.

The reader or student may always test the merits of any composition by careful analysis. Anything in literature which will not bear inspection, which cannot be weighed and examined, which may not be differently expressed, is mere verbiage. If paragraphs, sentences, and words have a meaning, that meaning may easily be seized upon and unfolded. One method in particular has been noticed in a recent number of the *Athenæum*,* and the remarks of the critic in recommending the adoption of such a system in our educa-

The reviewer's remarks are admirable, and may act as an antidote to the poison swallowed in such quantities.

* January 3, 1857.

tional establishments are so good, that we have no hesitation in quoting them :—"It was Dr. Arnold, we think, who regretted that it was not the custom in our higher schools and colleges to read some of our best English authors in the minute and careful manner universally practised in reading the Greek and Latin classics, and who expressed a belief that, if this custom were once well established, many of those benefits which result from the learning of Greek and Latin might be derived, to nearly the same extent, from vernacular studies alone. The same idea must have occurred to many. If, in our schools and colleges, pupils were made to read Shakespeare or Milton, in short passages at a time, just as Homer and Sophocles, or Virgil and Horace, are read ; if each word of the text were carefully studied, each difficult etymology traced, each unusual idiom investigated, each peculiarity in syntax or prosody inspected, each allusion explained, each beauty in thought or expression brooded over lovingly ; if, in short, every particle of every line were made to pass slowly, and perhaps three or four separate times for separate purposes, through the mind, as a good classical tutor makes his class parse Greek or Latin text, there can be no doubt that, besides other advantages, the process would serve as a logical discipline little inferior to that which is, perhaps, the main recommendation at present of classical studies. The difficulty, as Dr. Arnold felt, is to introduce such a method, and become master of it. Our very familiarity with our own language prevents us from rolling every morsel of it under our tongue in the slow and deliberate way in which we treat dead vocables ; and besides, the art of exposition, as applied to the classical authors, is one made perfect by long usage and by academic tradition."

Ye admirers of popular authors, try, we beseech you, this experiment upon the compositions of your favourites, which you will speedily discover to consist of a grain of sense concealed in a wilderness of verbiage !

CHAPTER III.

GERMAN ONSLAUGHT UPON HOMER AND SHAKESPEARE.

"There are nations, it is reported, who aim their arrows and javelins at the sun and moon on occasions of eclipse, or any other offence ; but I never heard that the sun and moon abated their course through the heavens for it, or looked more angrily when they issued forth again to shed light on their antagonists. They went onward all the while in their own serenity and clearness, through unobstructed paths, without diminution and without delay. It was only the little world below that was in darkness."—W. S. LANDOR.

HOMER of course attracted the attention of the critical operators, and in their hands soon lost every trace of the vigour and rotundity of life. The Germans, some years since, won an unenviable notoriety for this style of criticism, which has been very ably described by a writer in a recent *Quarterly Review*:—"Wolf's erudite disciples, if they can be said to have agreed on anything besides the great general articles of misbelief, seem to have instinctively concurred in an antipathy to these time-hallowed miracles of thought and word. Whenever what they call *the action* comes to what they consider a halt ; that is, whenever the Poet is tempted to relieve his pictures of war and tumult by some exquisite glimpse of domestic tenderness, or—heated by a self-kindled flame of which those doctors have no more notion than Cheselden's patient had of scarlet—expands into some delicious commemoration of old personal reminiscence or dear dream of romantic tradition—it is *luce clarius* that this is a patch. The antique manufacturing company knew their business too well to have winked at such interferences with the rubrical continuity of the patent web—

they were stuck on by the sciolists, who sent in their accounts for travelling expenses, attendance at consultations, copies made, and *sundries*, to the treasury of Pisistratus.

"In this way they put out of court for ever, on the motion of Counsellor Hermann, or Lachmann, or some other of his understrappers, whatever has signally familiarized and brought home to us the most masculine of Homer's characters; whatever has made us sympathize with the flesh and blood, and be merciful to the frailties of others; whatever, in short, has made them living types of human nature and the despair of all the poets of 3,000 years—save one. Apply the same sort of process to that one;—but let us be merciful—apply it only to the most learned, adroit, and artistical (in the doctor's own sense of that last word) among Homer's or Shakspeare's successors. What fortunate riddances, now, in the case of Virgil!—how many of his crack paragraphs are manifest *panni!*—think of fathering on such an expert as that such a gross interpolation as the purposeless episode of Euryalus, or such a transparent clumsiness as a piece of flattery about Marcellus! Such superfœtations will not bear a touch of the scalpel.

"Or take Milton:—what a swoop of his pretty eaglets! What a world of stuffed-in abortive excrescences about Pagan mythology, mediæval romance, blindness of an ex Latin secretary of Oliver Cromwell—evil days of the Cabal—and Lely's bevies! Imagine the gravest of Christian poets mixing up Eve and Proserpine, the fall of the angels with discharges of artillery—Galaphron and his city of Albracca—Charlemagne and all his chivalry at Fontarabia. So treated, no doubt, poets may be shorn of their most troublesome beams and reduced by safe manipulation within the comprehension of the critical lens."*

The remoteness of the era in which Homer lived

* Quarterly Review, vol. 87, No. 174, p. 445.

afforded these professors an excellent opportunity for attempting to destroy him altogether. They had no sooner stowed away the glorious father of epic poetry in safety among the myths, than the keen-eyed vultures of the criticism of annihilation cast their greedy eyes upon our own sweet Shakespeare. With him they were compelled to deal in a different manner; the proofs of his having actually existed were too numerous to admit of the application to his case of this summary process of annihilation.

The man William Shakespeare had been a rather important personage in his day and generation, and what is more, had left several evidences of the part he had played, that could not be explained away; so the extinguisher was laid aside, and the critics grasped the tomahawk; although they could not crush out his existence, they thought they might manage to hew his reputation to pieces. So to work they went; and mighty were the results. They could not annihilate the man Shakespeare, but they might reduce the poet within reasonable dimensions. This was the expedient by which they hoped to gain their ends.

To overrate the merits of his contemporaries, and to depreciate his, was their solution of the difficulty. Zealously did they labour at this new hobby, terrible were their efforts to pull down Shakespeare, and to erect their own blocks of wood and stone in his place. They plied their oars vigorously against the stream of common sense and honest truth, imagining that, because the water flowed past them, they were making rapid advances. But the German dreamers had hit upon something like a real difficulty at last; and they found Shakespeare possessed of a vitality which they had little suspected. They could not demolish a reputation that had taken root in every quarter of the globe; a fame which, like the air, pervaded the universe.

The sagacious writer in the *Quarterly*, to whom we

have already referred, has administered a castigation upon these offenders, from the effects of which they are not likely to recover. He says: "First of all, they never see—we really doubt if any even of their better men, except Schlegel and Goëthe (who never went leisurely into the subject), had the least glimpse of—the immense gulf that intervenes between Shakspeare and those whom it has been too common to speak of as the other great dramatists of the Elizabethan period. One makes every allowance for the purblind ecstasies of professed black-letter moles and grubs at home or abroad; but what are we to say when we find persons enjoying the reputation in their own country, not only of universal critics, but of original poets, who painfully translate, edit, and comment upon 'the Fore-school of Shakspeare,' that is, the limping poetasters that wrote plays before Shakspeare produced his master-pieces, and from whom he occasionally borrowed the thread of a story, or the dim and tremulous outline of a character; and gravely proceed, from first to last, on the notion that these worthies have been comparatively neglected here, not because they are poetasters, but because Shakspeare is with us a blind, bigoted, intolerant superstition? In like manner, when they grapple with the great bard himself, the mark nine times out of ten is to saddle him with some play which he had nothing to do with, or at most, in his capacity of Globe proprietor, had gone over pen in hand, touching up the dialogue here and there, and perhaps sticking in some vivid speech or scene of his own, *ad captandum*; or else it is to prove that what his benighted countrymen have voted a blot, is one of his sublimest beauties; to elucidate the profound philosophy lurking under what Warburton and Johnson took for a mere pun; or how completely all English readers, for two hundred and fifty years, have mistaken one of his really simplest and most elementary characters; that men had always read him, in fact, straightforward, or

from left to right, or at best *boustrophedon*—never in the real authentic way—that is, upside down—until salvation flashed on the world from some farthing candle at Heidelberg. For example, one luminous professor makes it clear as mud, that 'Arden of Feversham' was penned wholly by Shakspeare, and ranks with his very first master-pieces; to wit, not 'Macbeth' or 'Othello,' but 'Titus Andronicus,' or 'Pericles, Prince of Tyre,' or the 'Two Noble Kinsmen.' Another establishes, in one hundred and fifty pages of text, with foot-notes as long but not so light as Bayle's, that the same poet never could have created both a Lear and a Falstaff. Another delivers as the result of a not less laborious investigation, that we are wholly wrong about Dolly Tearsheet, whose genuine affection for Sir John ought to cover a multitude of early indiscretions, and who was uttering the deepest emotion of a true heart when she declared that she would never dress herself handsome again, till her little tidy boar-pig came back from the wars.

"Then there is a whole school who consider it as a capital blunder to take Shakspeare's dramas for the best of his performances, but fight lustily among themselves as to whether that character belongs righteously to his Sonnets or his 'Venus and Adonis;' but we think the Sonneteers are now the topping sect, though what half the Sonnets are about, hardly two are agreed. Such is the art of extracting sunbeams from cucumbers, exhibited with equal success in the Homeric and Shakspearian departments. * * * Much of the same happy discrimination is to be admired in their estimates of British authors generally—dead or living. Ossian has stood his ground: they are not to be gulled with the vulgar romances about Macpherson; the originals were examined and approved by Sir John Sinclair, and published *in extenso* by the Highland Society. Ossian is infinitely the greatest as well as the oldest of our insular bards; he can never be too much studied,

whether for mythology, history, manners, or metres. Richardson, too, flourishes; he, not Fielding, is the real 'life-painter' of George the Second's time. Blackmore is not without friends. Hervey (not Sporus, but the Meditator) is in great feather. There are two charms which never fail—dulness and finery; choose between drab and pink, but with either you are sure of immortality. Creep, or walk on stilts. If you dance, let it be on a barn-floor, or a tight-rope; if you fiddle, play on one string, or with your toes. Nature vibrates between truism and conceit; these are the legitimate alphabet, the rest intrusive, not real Cadmus. If any gifted son of any Muse be vilipended at home, whether on pretence of platitudes or of affectations, let him be of good cheer,—few prophets are honoured in their own land. If Germany should by any miraculous infelicity overlook him, America will not; but commonly the critical sentiment of these grand arbiters will be in unison. Look at any Leipzig catalogue, and consider what sort of English books are most translated. The only thing you may be confident of, is that, if you see one author worried among half a dozen rival oversetters, you had never heard of him in England. And so in the other high appeal court of Parnassus—when Sir Charles Lyell last arrived at Boston, he found all the town agog about some Professor's course of lectures (we think the name was Professor Peabody) on the poetry of Miss Eliza Cook,—the Sappho, or Corinna, we believe, of the 'London *Weekly Dispatch*.' We cannot doubt that she has also been illustrated by Frescoists of Düsseldorff." *

Such was one kind of that fierce warfare waged against Shakespeare and his productions, until Mr. William Henry Smith discovered a fresh method of assault, in comparison with which all former systems may be called mild and benevolent.

* Quarterly Review, vol. 87, No. 174, p. 440. The whole article is well worth perusal.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BACONIAN THEORY.

"I had rather be a tick in a sheep, than such a valiant ignorance."
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

THERE is nothing more remarkable in the annals of English literature than the vicissitudes that have attended both the fame and the writings of Shakespeare. During the Great Rebellion that broke out soon after his death, the Puritans endeavoured to root out the stage from among the institutions of the country, and to obliterate all traces of dramatic literature. Not only were the writings of Shakespeare and those of his contemporaries, sought out and destroyed, but his character was libelled, and his fair fame assailed. Then came the adapters and mutilators of every kind, and various denominations. Some cut down, others amended ; some struck out a scene, others annihilated a character. Improvement of Shakespeare was their great canon of criticism. According to the general idea, he had become famous by accident, and grew a poet in his own despite.

Schlegel in Germany, and Coleridge in this country, first instituted a more genial kind of criticism, and succeeded in restoring Shakespeare to the pedestal from which he had been unjustly displaced. "Let me now proceed," says Coleridge, "to destroy, as far as may be in my power, the popular notion that he was a great dramatist by mere instinct, that he grew immortal in his own despite, and sank below men of second or third-rate power, when he attempted aught beside the drama—even as bees construct their cells and manufacture their honey to

admirable perfection; but would in vain attempt to build a nest. Now this mode of reconciling a compelled sense of inferiority with a feeling of pride, began in a few pedants, who having read that Sophocles was the great model of tragedy, and Aristotle the infallible dictator of its rules, and finding that the Lear, Hamlet, Othello, and other masterpieces, were neither in imitation of Sophocles, nor in obedience to Aristotle,—and not having (with one or two exceptions) the courage to affirm, that the delight which their country received from generation to generation, in defiance of the alterations of circumstances and habits, was wholly groundless,—took upon them, as a happy medium and refuge, to talk of Shakspeare as a sort of beautiful *lusus naturæ*, a delightful monster,—wild, indeed, and without taste or judgment, but, like the inspired idiots so much venerated in the East, uttering, amid the strangest follies, the sublimest truths. In nine places out of ten in which I find his awful name mentioned, it is with some epithet of 'wild,' 'irregular,' 'pure child of nature,' &c. If all this be true, we must submit to it; though to a thinking mind it cannot but be painful to find any excellence, merely human, thrown out of all human analogy, and thereby leaving us neither rules for imitation, nor motives to imitate;—but if false, it is a dangerous falsehood;—for it affords a refuge to secret self-conceit,—enables a vain man at once to escape his reader's indignation by general swollen panegyrics, and merely by his *ipse dixit* to treat as contemptible, what he has not intellect enough to comprehend, or soul to feel, without assigning any reason, or referring his opinion to any demonstrative principle;—thus leaving Shakspeare as a sort of grand Lama, adored indeed, and his very excrements prized as relics, but with no authority or real influence. I grieve that every late voluminous edition of his works would enable me to substantiate the present charge with a variety of facts, one-tenth of which would of themselves exhaust the time allotted to me. Every critic, who has

or has not made a collection of black-letter books—in itself a useful and respectable amusement—puts on the seven-league boots of self-opinion, and strides at once from an illustrator into a supreme judge, and, blind and deaf, fills his three-ounce phial at the waters of Niagara; and determines positively the greatness of the cataract to be neither more nor less than his three-ounce phial has been able to receive."

His character, like his dramas, was assailed in every possible manner. He was said to have been a papist, a bad husband, a drunkard. Yet no sooner was a rigorous investigation instituted, than the scales began to fall from the eyes of the critics. He whom they had all made their butt, came out of the ordeal unscathed; and at length it was established in the most satisfactory manner, that the life and conduct of this glorious genius were as fully entitled to respectful admiration as his works. Both life and writings were found to be in all respects worthy of a great soul—of a king amongst mankind. On broad and substantial grounds he has become an object of veneration to the majority of Englishmen, as well as to thousands of kindreds and countries, who have learned, in his own expressive language, to believe that

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,"

when Mr. William Henry Smith starts his new theory, which we have not the slightest hesitation in denouncing as the most infamous and wanton attack that has yet been made, either at home or abroad, by insidious or avowed enemy, upon his reputation.

Innovators and their admirers would doubtless claim merciful and lenient treatment for this assailant of Shakespeare and Bacon. Has he dealt tenderly with them? has he respected their reputations? If what he advances be correct, is not Shakespeare branded as a cheat and an impostor?—does not another stain fall on the escutcheon of the lord of St. Alban? That criticism alone can be

honest which is fearless, and shrinks not from calling things by their right names. Mr. William Henry Smith declares Shakespeare to be a rank impostor; and we say, without fear of contradiction, that such an accusation ought to have been accompanied by proofs. It is neither a light nor a trivial charge that he has brought against the Bard of Avon; it is one which no man of delicate and refined feelings would have advanced against the meanest of his fellows, unless able to substantiate it by proofs that nothing could shake. The literary merits of Shakespeare afford a fair and legitimate field for criticism and discussion—his private character ought to be sacred from attack.

Mr. William Henry Smith tells us, in the coolest manner possible, that Shakespeare did not write one of the dramas which he palmed off upon his contemporaries and posterity, and that he was content to strut in "borrowed plumes." To prop up an assertion so rash, he does not adduce one iota of evidence: on a bare surmise, he would consign to eternal infamy the two names that stand first in the roll of England's great spirits. Are we, then, to spare one who shows no mercy towards others—to crouch before a critic who scatters calumnies at hazard? It is this weak toleration of every new folly and absurdity, to use the mildest terms, that has filled our literature with false forms, raised up erroneous standards, and given a certain semblance of importance to a mushroom class of writers, who, although they make a stir now, will be surely overwhelmed by the advancing tide of time, and be as speedily forgotten.

It would be easy to show from Bacon's writings, his position, his failures in poetical composition, and many collateral circumstances, that he did not write the dramas of Shakespeare; but in this inquiry we intend to take higher ground. Were Bacon's claim disposed of, Mr. William Henry Smith would probably look about for another candidate, or perhaps assert, as some have, we

believe, hinted, that these inimitable compositions were produced by a dramatic manufacturing company, formed upon the soundest principles, with limited liability. We hope, therefore, after disposing of his wretched pamphlet, with its theories and its calumnies, to adduce proofs—incontestable proofs—sufficient so satisfy any reasonable man, that Shakespeare's claim to be regarded as the author of the dramas that bear his name cannot be for one moment disputed : it is clear and unassailable, established as certainly as any fact in our literary annals, and never ought to have been called in question.

The new theory is artfully introduced ; and in order to pave the way for its reception, the principal events in the life of the poet are summed up in the most partial manner. The reader will perceive that such is the case from the following table, in which Mr. William Henry Smith's summary of what he would have the world suppose to be known respecting Shakespeare and his family, and the facts established by recent researches, are placed in opposite columns.

Mr. William Henry Smith's Account.	*Facts established by the latest investigations.*
"It will be desirable, in the first instance, to bring together the best-established facts respecting the family and conduct of Shakespeare, whose history, disconnected from his plays, is as ordinary and intelligible as can possibly be. His father, a humble tradesman at Stratford-upon-Avon, by patient industry and perseverance conciliated the respect and regard of his fellow-townsmen ; and being admitted a member of the Corporation, rose, through the offices of Ale-taster, Constable, and Chamberlain, to that of Alderman and Bailiff, and became, consequently,	Richard Shakespeare, the poet's grandfather, was a holder of land ; and "thus," says Halliwell, "we find the poet of nature rising where we would wish to find him rise, from the inhabitants of the valley and woodland, carrying in his blood the impress of the healthiest and most virtuous class possessed in these days by England." John Shakespeare, the poet's father, took up his residence at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1551. As early as 1556, he became the holder of two copyhold estates, and in 1557 married Mary Arden, the daughter of a landed pro-

Mr. William Henry Smith's Account.

ex officio, a Magistrate: the fact of his humble origin being attested to the last, by his inability to write his name.

He appears, as he rose in consequence, to have abandoned his original trade of 'glover,' and to have turned his attention to agriculture; but this was not to his permanent advantage, for his fortunes seemed to have waned from 1576; until, after having received various indulgences from his colleagues, the Corporation of Stratford, in the year 1586, came to a resolution depriving John Shakespeare of his alderman's gown, because 'he doth not come to the halls when warned, nor hath not done of a long time.'

The same reason which caused him to be excused by his brother aldermen, in 1578, from the petty payment of fourpence per week for a temporary purpose, still, doubtless, continued to operate; and the obvious inference is, that he had sunk into so low a grade of poverty, that he was ashamed to appear among his fellow-townsmen.

These facts give colour to the reports which were in existence, that William Shakespeare was removed from school at an early age; and it is natural that this removal should have taken place in or about the year 1577, when the necessities of his father began to show themselves openly.

Such being the circumstances connected with the parentage of

Facts established by the latest investigations.

prietor, of good standing in the county of Warwick. In 1565 he was made alderman, in 1568 high bailiff, and in 1571 chief alderman. He possessed property, occupied and cultivated land, reared sheep, and from a union of different pursuits, by no means uncommon at that time, was a farmer, a dealer in wool, and a glover. In 1579, John Shakespeare parted with some of his property, and his prosperity suffered a temporary decline.

This was not, however, so great as some have represented, nor was it of long duration. In 1596 we find him applying for a grant of arms, in which he is described as "John Shakespeare, of Stratford uppon-Avon, in the counte of Warwick, whose *parentes and late* antecessors were, for there valeant and faithefull service advanced and rewarded by the most prudent prince King Henry the Seventh of famous memorie, sythence whiche tyme they have continewed *at those partes* in good reputacion and credit; *and that the said John having maryed Mary, daughter and one of the heyrs of Robert Arden, of Wilmcote, in the said counte, gent,*" &c., which plainly proves that, either by his own exertions, or the good fortune of his son William, John Shakespeare had, at the time this application was made, recovered his former position in life. In 1580 he was classed among "the

Mr. William Henry Smith's Account.

William Shakespeare, the information we possess respecting his early years is even more scanty. There is neither record nor rumour of his having exhibited any precocity of talent. It is only known that, at the age of eighteen, he contracted, or was inveigled into a marriage with a woman eight years older than himself; and it is believed that, somewhere about the time at which his father was deprived of his alderman's gown, he left his wife and family at Stratford-upon-Avon, and went to seek his fortune in the metropolis."—*Pamphlet,* pp. 3—5.

Facts established by the latest investigations.

gentlemen and freholders," and died in 1601.

William Shakespeare was born in 1564, was most probably educated at "the King's New School of Stratford-upon-Avon," to which a charter had been granted by Edward VI. in 1553, and in which there can be no doubt that Latin, if not Greek, was taught. Supposing the poet to have been taken away from school in 1578, as Rowe suggests, on account of the change in the state of his father's affairs, he would then have been in his fifteenth year, and would, consequently, have had ample time to lay the foundations of a liberal education, which his own tastes, inclinations, and ambition would induce him to complete.

In 1582 he married Ann Hathaway, and probably soon after left Stratford for London, where he would naturally enough hope to find a fairer field for the exertion of those abilities with which Providence had blessed him, than within the narrow precincts of a country town.

The marriage licence was discovered by Sir R. Phillips, in the Consistorial Court of Worcester, and published by Mr. Wheler in 1836. It is dated November 28th, in the 25th year of Elizabeth, 1582. The description of the poet's wife is as follows: "Anne Hathwey, of Stratford, in the Dioces of Worcester, maiden."

In his beautiful, though somewhat fanciful "Biography of Shakespeare," Charles Knight deals very successfully with the calumnies that have been invented by some

critics, with reference to this event. He says: "It is scarcely necessary to point out to our readers that the view we have taken presupposes that the licence for matrimony, obtained from the Consistorial Court at Worcester, was a permission sought for under no extraordinary circumstances;—still less that the young man who was about to marry was compelled to urge on the marriage as a consequence of previous imprudence. We believe, on the contrary, that the course pursued was strictly in accordance with the customs of the time, and of the class to which Shakspere belonged. The espousals before witnesses, we have no doubt, were then considered as constituting a valid marriage, if followed up within a limited time by the marriage of the Church. However the Reformed Church might have endeavoured to abrogate this practice, it was unquestionably the ancient habit of the people. It was derived from the Roman law, the foundation of many of our institutions. It prevailed for a long period without offence. It still prevails in the Lutheran Church. We are not to judge of the customs of those days by our own, especially if our inferences have the effect of imputing criminality where the most perfect innocence existed."*

Mr. Halliwell, in that wonderful repository of facts and documents connected with the history of Shakespeare, prefixed to his new folio edition of that poet's works, takes precisely the same view. He says: "The espousals of the lovers were celebrated in the summer of 1582. In those days, betrothment, or contract of matrimony, often preceded actual marriage; and there need be no hesitation in believing that this ceremony was passed through by Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. There is the direct testimony of an author of 1543 that, in some places, it was regarded, in all essential particulars, as a regular marriage; and, provided the ceremony was cele-

* Book i. chap. xvi. p. 274, in the new and beautiful edition of this book published by Messrs. Routledge and Co.

brated in a reasonable time, no criminality could be alleged after the contract had been made. This opinion is well illustrated by a passage in the 'Winter's Tale,' Act i., Scene 2, expressive of disgust at one who 'puts to *before her troth-plight.*' The parish register of Stratford will show it was usual for cohabitation to take place before actual marriage; the existence of a contract fully counteracting any charge of impropriety."*

It will be seen that Mr. William Henry Smith lays great stress upon the supposed poverty of the poet's father, as well as upon the fact that this worthy parent could not write his own name. More importance has been attached to both of these matters than they deserve. John Shakespeare was involved in litigation, and he may have had some motive for wishing to conceal the real state of his affairs. From 1577 till 1586, he did not attend to his duties as an alderman, and was consequently, in the last-mentioned year, struck off the list, in precisely the same way as he had before been excused certain municipal payments. Yet we must not forget that, in two documents recently published, bearing the date of 1580, John Shakespeare is described among the "gentlemen and freeholders," in the first case of the hundred of Barlichway, and in the second, of the county of Warwick. The latter entry occurs in "A Book of the Names and Dwelling-places of the Gentlemen and Freeholders in the county of Warwick, 1580."† And in this John Shakespeare is assigned to Stratford-upon-Avon.

* Halliwell, Life, p. 88.

† See "A Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI., Mary, Elizabeth, 1547—1580, preserved in the State Paper Department of her Majesty's Public Record Office;" edited by Robert Lemon, F.S.A., under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, and with the sanction of her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Home Department. 1857. These valuable historical documents have not been before published, although they have been referred to and quoted by various writers.

The poet was then sixteen years old ; and there is no positive evidence that he did not pursue his studies at the Stratford-upon-Avon grammar-school up to this period. So much for the supposed poverty of John Shakespeare. Mr. William Henry Smith dwells with a kind of painful satisfaction upon the fact that John Shakespeare could not write his own name ; yet we do not perceive how this can prove that his son was not the most gifted man of the age. In the times in which John Shakespeare lived, it was not by any means so uncommon a thing for a man in good circumstances, and even of gentle parentage, to make his mark. The youth of John Shakespeare was cast in a period of transition; an old system had been broken up and destroyed, and the new one was not completely established in its place. Amid the troubles, the contentions, the revolutions and counter-revolutions that occurred between the reigns of Henry VIII. and of James I.—which eventful interval comprised the Reformation, followed by the re-ascendancy of the Catholic party, and the bloody interlude of Queen Mary's sway, and the re-establishment of pure religion under Elizabeth,—education and the gentler arts were but too often neglected.

In those unsettled times, the mental training and discipline of richer and more influential men than John Shakespeare did not receive the attention which they deserved, and there were many filling higher positions in society, who were compelled to plead guilty to the charge of want of scholarship, by affixing their mark to whatever documents they were called upon to subscribe. The poet, however, enjoyed advantages denied to his parent ; learning had in his day once more regained its rightful position ; and at the Stratford-upon-Avon grammar-school he doubtless received the rudiments of a liberal education.

Let us grant, for the sake of the argument, that Mr. William Henry Smith's account of the change that

occurred in John Shakespeare's circumstances, is correct, and that the extreme degree of importance which he seems to attach to the fact that he could not write his name, is also equally worthy of reception, what does he gain by the concessions? John Shakespeare's poverty and want of education are rotten foundations upon which to build arguments respecting the condition of the son. Neither the indigence of the former, nor his want of gentle accomplishments, will prove that the latter was not the first poet in the universe. The Omnipotent Ruler of the world hath thought fit, in his wisdom, to scatter his benefits freely amongst all classes and conditions, and often crowns the poor man's progeny with the diadem of intellectual superiority. The lengthy and honourable list of those who have emerged from the lower walks of life, into well-merited distinction, need not be inserted here; every student of history knows that all ranks and conditions can boast of their great men; and that while the offspring of mighty and potent monarchs have died in obscurity, the descendants of hewers of wood and drawers of water have climbed the dazzling heights of power. Mental endowments cannot be, like worldly possessions, transmitted from father to son: the intellectual order of merit does not recognize social distinctions.

Starting from these false premises, Mr. Henry William Smith proceeds to draw the erroneous conclusions that "William Shakespeare was a man of limited education, careless of fame, and intent upon money-getting;" neither of which assertions he attempts to prove, probably as fully aware as most reasonable people, that were they all substantiated, his theory would not be thereby advanced. In fact, the whole gist of the pamphlet may be summed up in this manner:—John Shakespeare was poor and ignorant, and could not have given his son a good education; and in addition to this, William Shakespeare cared little for fame, and only thought of money-making; there-

fore he did not write the plays that have so long been received as his productions.

Having settled matters with the poet and his father in this arbitrary manner, Mr. William Henry Smith proceeds to search for a man after his own heart. Lord Bacon suits his idea of a great dramatic author, and is at once advanced to the throne from which poor William, or what M. Ponsard would call "poor Williams,"* has been ruthlessly ejected. Lord Bacon was of noble extraction, and had received a good education; he possessed considerable ability for dramatic composition, and wanted money; in fact, to borrow Mr. William Henry Smith's own words, "His daily walk, letters, and conversation, constitute the beau-ideal of such a man as we might suppose the author of these plays to have been; and the very absence, in those letters, of all allusion to Shakespeare's plays, is some, though slight, corroboration of his connection with them." †

Was ever theory raised upon such stubble? By adopting this line of argument, the literary reputations of half the great names in our list of authors might be demolished in a few seconds. A single specimen from this medley of inconsistencies will serve to show how obstinately and absurdly their author contradicts himself. One reason which he advances with much gravity as affording satisfactory proof that William Shakespeare did not write these plays, is that he was "careless of fame." ‡

Now let the reader consider for a moment what this

* We have a strong notion that Mr. Henry William Smith and M. Ponsard are one and the same individual, and that this acute critic merely assumed the latter name while lecturing foreign audiences, in order to create for himself a twofold reputation. At any rate, they are kindred spirits, and a night with Ponsard and Mr. William Henry Smith, especially if the conversation happened to turn upon Shakespeare, would be a literary banquet, of which even Athenæus himself could not have formed a conception.

† Pamphlet, p. 10. ‡ Pamphlet, p. 6.

insensibility to the allurements of fame induced William Shakespeare to do? It was not to bury himself in obscurity, or to take the profit arising from certain plays, leaving the glory to another, but actually to appropriate to himself the credit of having penned the masterpieces of our dramatic literature, which credit belonged by right to Francis Bacon. It must not be forgotten that the merit of these dramas was recognized in the days of Bacon and Shakespeare. Everybody possessed of a particle of common sense or discernment understood that they were immeasurably superior to anything in our language, in fact, to all compositions of the kind in universal literature. The man, "careless of fame, intent upon money-getting,"* filches the former and relinquishes the gains without compunction. "Careless of fame," he wraps himself in the mantle of Bacon's reputation; "intent upon money-getting," he perpetrates this great wrong, in order to replenish Bacon's exhausted treasury. "Careless of fame," he receives the homage, to which he was by no means entitled, of poets, statesmen, and crowned heads; "intent upon money-getting," he hands over the cash to Francis Bacon. Admiring audiences, enraptured students, patrons of learning and literature, pay tribute after tribute to his genius, and William Shakespeare receives them, and allows the press to pour forth edition after edition of particular plays, of which the authorship was assigned to him, without uttering a word of remonstrance, while the noble intellect that produced these masterpieces pined in comparative obscurity.

Reasoning more absurd never appeared in print; Mr. William Henry Smith actually endeavours to draw from these facts a conclusion diametrically opposed to the one they naturally convey. It is obvious that had Shakespeare done as this sagacious critic insinuates, he would have shown himself greedy of fame, and careless as to the

* Pamphlet, p. 6.

reward. Had he permitted one of his contemporaries to take the credit of having written his dramas, in return for pecuniary satisfaction, he must then have pleaded guilty to the imputation of having been "careless of fame, intent upon money-getting;" but this is not the charge Mr. William Henry Smith wishes to fix upon him; and this over clever disputant has argued upon false premises and come to an opposite conclusion to the one which he wished to establish. In fact he has lost himself in a maze, and while seeking to show that Shakespeare was "careless of fame and intent upon money-getting," has, if his arguments are to be regarded as trustworthy, proved the very contrary.

In order to afford Mr. William Henry Smith every possible advantage, we append the view taken of his pamphlet in the communication of an intelligent though over-credulous correspondent of "Notes and Queries." This writer says: "As your correspondent has furnished a somewhat striking coincidence* between an expression of Shak-

* The following is the "somewhat striking coincidence" alluded to.

"In the play of *Henry V.*, Act iii. Sc. iii., occurs the following line:—

'The gates of mercy shall be all shut up.'

And again in *Henry VI.*:—

'Open the gate of mercy, gracious Lord!'

"Sir Francis Bacon uses the same idea in a letter written to King James a few days after the death of Shakspeare:—'And therefore, in conclusion, he wished him (the Earl of Somerset) not *to shut the gate* of your majesty's *mercy* against himself by being obdurate any longer.'"[a]

This, at the most, can only prove that Bacon took the expression from Shakespeare. *Henry V.* was printed in 1600, and this letter was written as late as 1616. It is probable that both authors got the idea from the Bible, in which "gate of the Lord," "gate of righteousness," and similar terms, frequently occur.

[a] Notes and Queries, Second Series, No 40, p. 267.

speare and a passage of a letter written by Lord Bacon, it may be worth while to preserve in 'N. and Q.' a summary of Mr. W. H. Smith's argument on the point in question. He contends: 1. That the character of Shakspeare, as sketched by Pope, is the exact biography of Bacon. 2. That Bacon possessed dramatic talent to a high degree, and could, according to his biographers, 'assume the most different characters, and speak the language proper to each with a facility that was perfectly natural.' 3. That he wrote and assisted at bal-masques, and was the intimate friend of Lord Southampton, the acknowledged patron of Shakspeare. 4. That the first folio of 1623 was not published till Bacon had been driven to private life, and had leisure to revise his literary works; and that as he was obliged to raise money by almost any means, it is at least probable that he did so by writing plays. 5. That Shakspeare was a man of business rather than poetry, and acknowledged his poems and sonnets, but never laid claim to the plays."*

This is, after all, as good a summary as can be given of the wretched arguments upon which Mr. William Henry Smith bases his new, preposterous, and altogether untenable theory. They may be dismissed in a few sentences. 1. Shakespeare's character could not possibly be the biography of another man. 2. Bacon's ability for dramatic composition cannot be accepted as a proof that he wrote plays to the authorship of which he never laid claim, and which were attributed to, and acknowledged by, one of his contemporaries. 3. Lord Southampton, the friend of Shakespeare and Bacon, is, as we shall see more fully in another chapter, a witness against Mr. William Henry Smith and his theory. 4. Bacon's leisure and want of funds will never justify even the suspicion that he wrote the plays of Shakespeare. 5. The assertion that Shakespeare was a man of business rather than poetry is directly

* Notes and Queries, Second Series, No. 45, p. 369.

at variance with the truth, as any person who has perused the "Venus and Adonis," "Lucrece," and the Sonnets, will at once admit. It is equally false to assert that Shakespeare did not claim the authorship of these dramas. He allowed them to be published with his name affixed to them, not denying his right to be regarded as their author, although he condemned the illegal manner in which copies had been obtained by greedy publishers; he received and accepted various and numerous tributes of commendation, not only from friends and associates, but even from statesmen and rulers; and he permitted his contemporaries to give him the credit of having penned these inimitable productions without offering a remonstrance.

If these do not constitute a claim to their authorship, and one that cannot be upset, save by unimpeachable evidence, we should be glad to know upon what grounds we can attribute any works we may possess to any particular writer. If the summary of Mr. William Henry Smith's arguments is to be enshrined in "Notes and Queries," or any other periodical published in the United Kingdom, let the refutation, which is simple enough, be placed at its side, that the younger wayfarers on the great highroads of learning may not be led astray, even for a moment, by what we cannot honour with a better term than the flimsiest productions of a disordered brain.

Mr. William Henry Smith quotes what he calls "these remarkable words," from Lord Bacon's will:—"My name and memory I leave to foreign nations; and to my own countrymen, after some time be passed over." That this passage contains no secret allusion to the authorship of Shakespeare's plays must be evident to any one acquainted with Lord Bacon's history. He merely expressed a hope that the lapse of time might set him right with posterity, and that the conduct which led to his dismissal from office, degradation, and amercement, might at some future day be regarded in a more favourable light. He trusted that the stain that blotted his lofty repu-

tation, and somewhat tarnished the splendour of his deeds, might, after a short interval, be removed, and that his countrymen would some day consider him great in the true acceptation of the term. Moreover, Lord Bacon needed not the credit of having written the dramas of Shakespeare : his renown is colossal ; and of all Englishmen he has the least to gain by filching from the reputations of others.

Mr. William Henry Smith brings his pamphlet to a close with the following letter.

"*To the Lord Viscount St. Alban.*

"MOST HONOURED LORD.—I have received your great and noble token and favour of the 9th of April, and can but return the humblest of my thanks for your Lordship's vouchsafing so to visit this poorest and unworthiest of your servants. It doth me good at heart, that, although I be not where I was in place, yet I am in the fortune of your Lordship's favour, if I may call that fortune, which I observe to be so unchangeable. I pray hard, that it may once come in my power to serve you for it ; and who can tell, but that, as *fortis imaginatio generat casum*, so strange desires may do as much ? Sure I am, that mine are ever waiting on your Lordship ; and wishing as much happiness, as is due to your incomparable virtue, I humbly do your Lordship reverence.

"Your Lordship's most obliged and humble servant,

"TOBIE MATTHEW.

"POSTC.—The most prodigious wit, that ever I knew of my nation, and of this side of the sea, is of your Lordship's name, *though he be known by another.*"

The Italics in the last line are Mr. William Henry Smith's ; and although that gentleman does not condescend to offer note, comment, or explanation, either upon the epistle itself or its author, he evidently wishes his

readers to draw the conclusion, from the words which he has underlined, that Lord Bacon wrote the dramas of Shakespeare, and that to Sir Tobie Matthew the secret of their authorship was intrusted.

The epistle is inserted by Dr. Thomas Birch, among "Letters, Speeches, Charges, Advices, &c. of Francis Bacon,"* and may be found, with some others, at the end of the volume. Dr. Birch says of them :—"The following letters, wanting both dates and circumstances to determine such dates, are placed together." The communication is not of the slightest consequence, nor does it contain one tittle of evidence in support of Mr. William Henry Smith's theory. But its author played a rather prominent part in his day and generation, was very intimate with Lord Bacon; therefore some account of him may be acceptable to many readers, and will also serve to convince them, that had he possessed such information as that to which Mr. William Henry Smith alludes, it would long since have been given to the world.

Tobie Matthew, the son of Dr. Tobie Matthew, bishop of Durham, and afterwards archbishop of York, was born at Oxford, in 1578, his father being at that time dean of Christchurch. In a letter to Sir Thomas Chaloner, Bacon styles him "my very good friend," and "a very worthy young gentleman;" and Anthony Wood (*Athenæ Oxonienses*, vol. iii. p. 403) says that "he had all his father's name, and many of his natural parts; was also one of considerable learning, good memory, and sharp wit, mixed with a pleasant affability in behaviour, and a seeming sweetness of mind, though sometimes, according to the company he was in, pragmatical, and a little too forward."

Whilst travelling upon the continent, Mr. Matthew was induced, by the influence, it is said, of the Jesuit Father Parsons, to abandon the religion of his family and country, and to become a Roman Catholic. This did not diminish

* London, 1763, p. 392.

the friendship between him and Bacon, although it is probably in reference to this perversion that the latter wrote the following touching epistle, which has been published, but without date:*—

"Do not think me forgetfull or altered towards you. But if I should say I could do you any good, I should make my power more then it is. I do fear that which I am right sorry for,—that you grow more impatient and busie then at first; which makes me exceedingly fear the issue of that which seemeth not to stand at a stay. I myself am out of doubt that you have been miserably abused when you were first seduced; and that which I take in compassion, others may take in severity. I pray God, that understands us all better then we understand one another, continue you, as I hope he will, at least, within the bounds of loyalty to his Majesty, and natural piety to your Country. And I intreat you much to meditate sometimes upon the effect of Superstition in this last *Powder-Treason;* fit to be tabled and pictured in the Chambers of *Meditation*, as another Hell above the ground; and well justifying the censure of the Heathen; that *Superstition is far worse than Atheism;* by how much it is less evil to have no opinion of God at all, then such as are impious towards his divine Majesty and goodness. Good Mr. *Matthews* receive your self back from these courses of Perdition. Willing to have written a great deal more, I continue, &c."

Controversy in those times ran high, and as Tobie Matthew was unwilling to take the oath of allegiance, he quitted England in 1609. In July, 1617, he obtained permission to return, but was again compelled to depart in October, 1618. In a letter written at Brussels, during this second exile, he thus addresses Lord Bacon:—

* Scrinia Sacra: Secrets of Empire, in Letters of Illustrious Persons; a Supplement to the Cabala, 1654, p. 67.

"Most Honoured Lord, I am here at good leisure to look back upon your Lordship's great and noble goodness towards me, which may go for a great example in this age; and so it doth. That, which I am sure of, is, that my poor heart, such as it is, doth not only beat, but even boil in the desires it hath to do your Lordship all humble service."*

He was recalled in 1622 to lend his assistance in forwarding the match with Spain; and for his exertions in furtherance of the same, was knighted by James I., at Royston, on the 10th of October, 1623. He died in a Jesuit College at Ghent, in Flanders, October 13, 1655.

Tobie Matthew is said to have been a man of "very good parts and literature, but of an active and restless temper." His change of religion seems to have deeply affected Lord Bacon, who with reference to that subject in another of his letters, thus addresses him :—

"For in good faith, I do conceive hope, that you will so govern your self, as we may take you as assuredly for a good *Subject*, and *Patriot*, as you take your self for a good *Christian*. And so we may again enjoy your company, and you your conscience, if it may no other ways be. For my part, assure your self (as we say in the law), *mutatis mutandis*, my love, and good wishes to you, are not diminished."†

Whilst upon the continent, Tobie Matthew translated his friend's essays into the Italian language, and in his epistle to the duke of Florence, prefixed to that translation, refers to Lord Bacon in these terms :—

"St. Austin said of his illegitimate son, *Horrori mihi erat illud ingenium*, and truly I have known a great

* Birch, Letters, &c., p. 225.

† Letters of Sir Francis Bacon, collected by R. Stephens, 1702, p. 47.

number whom I much value, many whom I admire, but none who hath so astonisht me, and, as it were, ravisht my senses, to see so many and so great parts, which in other men were wont to be incompatible, united, and that in an iminent degree in one sole Person. I know not whether this truth will find easie belief, that there can be found a man beyond the Alpes, of a most ready wit; most faithful memory; most profound judgment; of a most rich and apt expression; universal in all kinds of knowledge, as in part may be seen by that rare incomparable piece, the 'Advancement of Learning,' which future ages shall render in different languages. But be the faith of other nations what it will in this point, the matter I report is so well understood in England, that every man knows and acknowledges as much, nay, hath been an eye and ear-witness thereof; nor, if I should expatiate upon this subject, should I be held a flatterer, but rather a suffragan to truth."

The following letter, written by Lord Bacon in 1623, the very year in which the first folio of Shakespeare was published, is so important that we are induced to give it entire. It will be seen that in this communication Bacon refers to his literary labours, and the works he had been revising; but amongst these no mention is made either of poems or dramas; and it is hardly possible to believe that on such an occasion he would have refrained from noticing the collected edition of his plays, had he really been the author of the folio of 1623. To Tobie Matthew he could unbosom himself; and there cannot be the slightest doubt that to him, at least, he would have spoken of his dramatic works without hesitation. The letter is indorsed to "Mr. Matthew into Spain," and the fact of the separation, though temporary, of the friends, would afford an additional reason for confidence :—

"Good Mr. Matthew,—

"I thank you for your letter of the 26th of June, and commend myself unto your friendship, knowing your word is good assurance, and thinking I cannot wish myself a better wish, than that your power may grow to your will.

"Since you say the Prince hath not forgot his commandment, touching my History of Henry VIII., I may not forget my duty. But I find Sir Robert Cotton, who poured forth what he had, in my other work, somewhat dainty of his materials in this.

It is true, my labours are now most set to have those works, which I had formerly published, as that of *Advancement of Learning*, that of *Henry VII.*, that of the *Essays*, being retractate, and made more perfect, well translated into Latin by the help of some good pens, which forsake me not. For these modern languages will, at one time or other, play the bankrupts with books: and since I have lost much time with this age, I would be glad, as God shall give me leave, to recover it with posterity.

For the essay of friendship, while I took your speech of it for a cursory request, I took my promise for a compliment. But since you call for it, I shall perform it.

"I am much beholden to Mr. Gage for many expressions of his love to me; and his company, in itself very acceptable, is the more pleasing to me, because it retaineth the memory of yourself.

"This letter of yours, of the 26th, lay not so long by you, but it hath been as speedily answered by me, so as with Sir Francis Cottington, I have had no speech since the receit of it. Your former letters, which I received from Mr. Griesley, I had answered before, and put my letter into a good hand.

"For the great business, God conduct it well. Mine own fortune hath taught me expectation. God keep you."*

* Letters, Speeches, Charges, Advices, &c. of Francis Bacon. By Thomas Birch, D.D., 1763, pp. 346.

The request concerning the Essay on Friendship particularly interesting. The first edition of the Essays, published in 1597, contains only ten pieces, and not one amongst these that treats upon Friendship. The same thing occurs in the editions of 1598 and 1606; but in 1612, an enlarged edition appeared, containing thirty-eight (the table of contents gives forty) essays, with one upon Friendship standing thirteenth upon the list. It is very short, differs materially from the text of the one now in general use; and as it may not be within the reach of all readers, we append it.

"OF FRIENDSHIP.

"There is no greater desert or wilderness then to be without true friends. For without friendship, society is but meeting. And as it is certaine, that in bodies inanimate, union strengtheneth any naturall motion, and weakeneth any violent motion; so amongst men, friendship multiplieth joies, and divideth griefes. Therefore, whosoever wanteth fortitude, let him worshippe *Friendship*. For the yoke of *Friendship* maketh the yoke of *fortune* more light. There bee some whose lives are, as if they perpetually plaid upon a stage, disguised to all others, open onely to themselves. But perpetuall dissimulation is painfull; and hee that is all *Fortune*, and no *Nature*, is but an exquisit *Hierling*. Live not in continuall smother, but take some friends with whom to communicate. It will unfold thy understanding; it will evaporate thy affections; it will prepare thy businesse. A man may keepe a corner of his minde from his friend, and it be but to witnesse to himselfe, that it is not upon facility, but upon true use of friendship that he impart-eth himselfe. Want of true friends, as it is the reward of perfidious natures; so it is an imposition upon great fortunes. The one deserve it, the other cannot scape it. And therefore it is good to retaine sincerity, and to put it into the reckoning of *Ambition*, that the higher one

goeth, the fewer true friends he shall have. Perfection of friendship is but a speculation. It is friendship, when a man can say to himselfe, I love this man without respect of utility. I am open-hearted to him, I single him from the generality of those with whom I live; I make him a portion of my owne wishes."

Our readers will readily perceive that the text of this differs very materially from that of the Essay upon the same subject, with which they are generally acquainted. In 1625, a newly augmented edition of these Essays made its appearance, in which the Essay upon Friendship was greatly enlarged, being put forth, in fact, in pretty much the form in which we find it in more modern editions; and it came twenty-seventh, in a list of fifty-eight. The Essay on Friendship was, in all probability, rewritten and extended in deference to the request of Tobie Matthew; and we may reasonably suppose that Lord Bacon had his friend in view when engaged in this charming composition.

Sir Tobie survived his friend nearly thirty years; many of his letters have been published; and it is evident that, had he been possessed of any such secret as that to which Mr. William Henry Smith refers, it would have been revealed. He was fond of mixing himself up in the affairs of celebrated people, and was not the kind of person to have carried with him to the grave a secret, the disclosure of which must have created a profound sensation at the time, and produced quite a revolution in men's minds respecting one of the most important matters in English literature.

Many of Bacon's letters and papers have been published at different times, and the absence from these of any allusion to this supposed authorship is an additional proof, were more required, that he did not write these dramas.*

* The new edition of Bacon's works, now in progress, in which the public are promised some additional letters and MSS., will doubtless still further confirm this view.

Moreover, not a scrap of blank verse is to be found amongst his papers; and it is utterly incredible that a man who had composed between thirty and forty of the finest plays in our language, should not have left any trace of his peculiar facility for dramatic composition, either in his other works, or amongst his private letters and manuscripts.

One more fact before we turn to another branch of the subject. In his will, Lord Bacon gave directions respecting the disposal of his papers. One portion of it is as follows:—"But towards that durable part of Memory, which consisteth in my Writings, I require my Servant, Henry Percy, to deliver to my Brother Constable all my Manuscript Compositions, and the Fragments also of such as are not finished; to the end that, if any of them be fit to be published, he may accordingly dispose of them. And herein I desire him to take the advice of Mr. Selden, and Mr. Herbert, of the Inner Temple, and to publish or suppress what shall be thought fit. In particular, I wish the Elegie, which I writ in *felicem memoriam Elizabethæ*, may be published."*

Lord Bacon says nothing of any dramatic works. Neither those persons to whom his papers were intrusted, nor others who have since submitted them to a searching examination, chanced to hit upon any such disclosure, or it would long since have furnished fresh matter of astonishment to all who take an interest in what is passing in the world of letters.

* Baconia, or Certaine Genuine Remaines of Francis Bacon, p. 203.

CHAPTER V.

PROOFS.

"Remember,
First to possess his books; for without them
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command."

THE TEMPEST.

IT is fit and proper that we should so far humour the proposer of this new theory, as to exhibit the kind of proofs which he deems sufficient to establish his charges of fraud and imposture against the most honoured name in literature. At the ninth page of this pamphlet, Mr. William Henry Smith remarks :—

"I purposely abstain from any attempt to compare the writings of the author I am about to mention with the plays which are attributed to Shakespeare, not merely because that is a labour too vast to enter upon now, but more particularly because it is essentially the province of the literary student."

The writer might have added, because such a comparison must be altogether delusive, and could prove nothing. A startling array of parallel passages might lead one to suppose that Bacon had borrowed from Shakespeare, or that Shakespeare had borrowed from Bacon, as the case might be, but they could not be received as demonstrating that the latter was the author of those dramas, which have, for more than two centuries, passed current as the productions of William Shakespeare.

Towards the close of his squib—for the effusion really merits no better title—Mr. William Henry Smith states,

"It is not my intention NOW to adduce proofs;" and the pamphlet is dated Brompton, Sept., 1856. It would, however, appear that the author managed to achieve the "vast labour" to which he referred, or found some "literary student" to do it for him; for in "Notes and Queries" of the 27th of December, a paper was published, entitled "Bacon and Shakspeare," bearing the signature "W. H. S." and dated from "Brompton, Middlesex." The initials reveal the true state of the case. The correspondent is Mr. William Henry Smith, who avails himself of the medium of a deservedly-popular periodical to bring his proofs before the public. As curiosities of the aberrations to which human intellects are but too prone, or illustrations of the extremes into which men run in pursuit of a favourite theory, they deserve especial notice; and we accordingly append them. We have made no alteration whatever either in the wording or arrangement of these quotations, which are indeed very carelessly thrown together, and are not taken from the best editions; and have merely numbered them for facility of reference.

BACON AND SHAKSPEARE.

1. ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING:

Poetry is nothing else but feigned history.

TWELFTH NIGHT, Act i. Sc. ii.:

Viola.—'Tis poetical.
Olivia.—It is more likely to be feigned.

AS YOU LIKE IT, Act iii. Sc. vii.:

The truest poetry is the most feigning.

---

2. ON BUILDINGS:

He that builds a fair house upon an ill seat committeth himself to prison; neither do I reckon that an ill seat only, where the air is unwholesome, but likewise where it is unequal.

MACBETH, Act i. Sc. vi. :

> This castle hath a pleasant seat—the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.

---

3. ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING :

Behaviour seemeth to me a garment of the mind, and to have the conditions of a garment. For it ought to be made in fashion, it ought not to be too curious.

HAMLET, Act i. Sc. iii. :

> Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
> But not exprest in fancy.

---

4. ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING :

In the third place I set down reputation, because of the peremptory tides and currents it hath, which, if they be not taken in due time, are seldom recovered, it being extreme hard to play an after game of reputation.

JULIUS CÆSAR, Act iv. Sc. iii. :

> There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune :
> Omitted, all the voyage of their life
> Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

---

5. ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING :

Is not the opinion of Aristotle worthy to be regarded, where he saith that young men are not fit auditors of *moral* philosophy, because they are not settled from the boiling heat of their affections, nor attempered by time and experience.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA, Act ii. Sc. iii. :

> Not much
> Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
> Unfit to hear *moral* philosophy.

Aristotle quoted incorrectly in both these passages. He says *political*, not *moral*, philosophy.

6. APOPHTHEGMS :

Bacon relates that a fellow named Hog importuned Sir Nicholas to save his life on account of the kindred between Hog and Bacon. "Aye, but," replied the judge, "You and I cannot be kindred except you be hanged; for Hog is not Bacon until it be well hanged."

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR :

Evans.—Hing—hang—hog.
S. Quickly.—Hang hog—is the Latin for Bacon.

---

7. ON CUNNING :

For there be many men that have secret hearts, but transparent countenances.

HENRY IV. :

The cheek
Is apter than the tongue to tell an errand.

---

8. COLLECTION OF SENTENCES :

He that hath a satirical vein, as he maketh others afraid of his wit, so he had need be afraid of others' memories.

HENRY VI. :

An insult, when we think it is forgotten,
Is written in the book of memory,
E'en in the heart, to scourge our apprehensions.

---

9. INTERPRETATION OF NATURE :

Yet evermore it must be remembered, that the least part of knowledge passed to man by this so large a charter from God—must be subject to that use for which God hath granted it, which is the benefit and relief of the state and society of man.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE, Act i. Sc. ii. :

Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence;
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,
Both use and thanks.

10. On Adversity:

It is more pleasing to have a lively work upon a sad and solemn errand, than to have a dark and melancholy work upon a lightsome errand.

Henry IV.:

Bright metals on a sullen errand
Will show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.

Note the peculiar use of the words *knee* and *chew*.

11. Life of Henry VII.:

As his victory gave him the knee, so his purposed marriage with the Lady Elizabeth gave him the heart, so that both knee and heart did truly bow before him.

Richard II.:

Show Heaven the humbled heart and not the knee.

Hamlet:

And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee.

---

12. On Studies:

Some books are to be tasted, and some few chewed and digested.

Julius Cæsar, Act i.:

Till then, my noble friend, chew upon this;
Brutus had rather be a villager.

---

13. Trench says "Essays" was a new word in Bacon's time, and his use of it quite novel. Bacon thus writes of his *Essays*:

Which I have called Essays. The word is late, though the thing is ancient.

Mrs. Clarke, in her *Concordance*, reports the word Essay as occurring twice in Shakespeare,—which, indeed, is true of Knight's Shakespeare; but it only occurs once

in the Folio of 1623, in relation to Edgar's letter to Edmund, in *Lear*. Edmund says,—

I hope, for my brother's justification, he wrote this but as an essay or task of my nature.

I have not included the example furnished by your correspondent. The allusion to "perspectives" in *Richard II.*, and the simile of Actæon in *Twelfth Night*, are worthy of remark.

I send these in the hope that your correspondents will add to them.*

The learned and obliging correspondents of "Notes and Queries" may save themselves the trouble; for innumerable instances of this description would not, more particularly in the teeth of the actual evidence we possess of Shakespeare's right to be regarded as the author of these plays, prop up the Baconian theory.

Anxious to meet Mr. William Henry Smith upon his own favourite and peculiar ground, we would ask, how is it possible that the slightest importance can be attached to these passages, paraded with so much satisfaction? Were they word for word and line for line alike, they would not be sufficient to prove, nor could a hundred such coincidences be regarded as a proof, that Lord Bacon wrote the dramas of Shakespeare. The majority have not sufficient in common to be called parallel passages; and if we select those most entitled to the appellation, what do they establish? Nothing more nor less than that Bacon did not hesitate to borrow an idea from his mighty contemporary. With views too exalted for the comprehension of the smaller fry of critics, the founder of the new philosophy was not afraid of showing that great

* Notes and Queries, Second Series, No. 52, p. 503. The punctuation in these quotations is wretched; and why should the reference to particular acts and scenes be given in some instances and not in others?

minds may put forth similar ideas and sentiments without dread of incurring a charge of plagiarism.

We cannot admit that these are parallel passages: were we willing to do so, the admission would be of no advantage to Mr. William Henry Smith. His quotations might show that Bacon had borrowed from Shakespeare: this is their only moral. With one exception, which shall be noticed in due course, their testimony is to this effect. Nos. 2 and 10 contain passages from essays written by Lord Bacon, which were not published until some years after Shakespeare's death, and the appearance of the first folio. The essays on Buildings and on Adversity are not found in any edition of Bacon's Essays previous to 1625. A pretty fact this to bring forward in favour of a theory that Lord Bacon wrote the dramas of Shakespeare. He might have seen them acted, and conned them over in his library hundreds of times, before he put forth a composition tinged with the magic hues of some of their richest thoughts. In the quotations given under No. 1, a certain degree of similarity will be found to exist between a passage in the "Advancement of Learning," and the comedy of "Twelfth Night." Bacon's treatise was first published in 1605, whereas "Twelfth Night" had been acted as early as 1602, if not before. In No. 6 on the list, we find a sentiment in Bacon's Apophthegms, first published in 1625, which resembles a passage in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," which was printed in 1602. Again, in No. 11, passages in "Richard II.," printed in 1597, and "Hamlet," in 1603, are similar to a sentence in Bacon's "Life of Henry the Seventh," which was written in 1616, and published in 1622. These facts, if they prove anything at all, would, like those to which we have already alluded in Nos. 2 and 10, show that Lord Bacon had studied Shakespeare to some purpose.

"But," Mr. William Henry Smith will probably exclaim, with an air of aggravated triumph, "you have not referred to the fifth instance in the list, in which a clear case of similarity is established between a passage in Lord Bacon's

'Advancement of Learning,' first published in 1605, and one in 'Troilus and Cressida,' which did not appear till 1609!" Supposing—for we are willing to concede as much as possible, especially in a case in which all our concessions will not be of much advantage to our opponent—we attribute to this fact its highest importance, and grant that it clearly shows that Shakespeare borrowed that particular idea, or error, from Bacon, what can that possibly matter? We will, however, repeat the passage, in case any created being besides Mr. William Henry Smith should be foolish enough to imagine that it is worthy even of consideration.

In the "Advancement of Learning," first published, as we said before, in 1605, Bacon commits a strange blunder, in confounding the terms political and moral philosophy. Mr. William Henry Smith quotes it thus:—"Is not the opinion of Aristotle worthy to be regarded, where he saith that young men are not fit auditors of *moral* philosophy, because they are not settled from the boiling heat of their affections, nor attempered by time and experience."* Shakespeare, in the comedy of "Troilus and Cressida," which was not printed until 1609, though it had been previously acted, falls into precisely the same

* It is a well-known fact, that the "Advancement of Learning" was first published in English, in two books. Bacon afterwards enlarged this work, divided it into nine books, and caused it to be translated into Latin. It was re-translated into English by Gilbert Wats, and published in 1640. There is a remarkable difference in the wording of this passage in the two treatises.

Editions of 1605, 1629, *and* 1633.

"Is not the opinion of *Aristotle* worthy to be regarded, wherein he saith, that young men are no fitte auditors of Moral Philosophy, because they are not setled from the boyling heate of their affections, nor attempered with Time and Experience?"—*Book* ii.

Gilbert Wat's edition, 1640.

"It is not a wise opinion of Aristotle, and worthy to be regarded: *That young men are no fit auditors of Morall Philosophy, because the boyling heat of their affections is not yet setled, nor attemperd with Time and Experience.*"—*Book* vii.

mistake. It occurs in Act ii. Scene 2, where he says,

> "Not much
> Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
> Unfit to hear *moral* philosophy."

Aristotle, it appears, uses the term "political," not "moral," as in these extracts. "Therefore," says Mr. William Henry Smith, "as both Bacon and Shakespeare misquote him, the plays of Shakespeare were written by Francis Bacon." "O most lame and impotent conclusion!" Why a thousand such instances would not prove that Bacon was the author of Shakespeare. They might indeed convince some minds that the latter was a plagiarist, but could not be received as evidence that he did not write those wonderful dramas, the glory of our literature, and one of the wonders of the world.

Moreover, the similarity between many passages in the poems and plays of Shakespeare is much more striking than that pointed out in any of the afore-mentioned instances. In order to give our readers an idea of the manner in which Mr. William Henry Smith may be worsted by his own weapons, we append thirteen illustrations, as a set-off against the same number which that sagacious Shakespearian critic communicated to "Notes and Queries."

We may as well remark that we have confined ourselves to this number, merely because we are unwilling to occupy more space with a theory that can lead to no positive results.

1. The use of the word "vail," in the sense of "to lower."

> "Then like a melancholy malcontent,
> He *vailes* his taile."—*Venus and Adonis.*
>
> "And see my wealthy Andrew docks in sand,
> *Vailing* her high top lower than her ribs."
> *The Merchant of Venice*, i. 1.*

* These passages are taken verbatim from the first editions of

2. Employment of the term "Eysell," or "Esile," which has raised such discussion amongst the commentators, and which Halliwell states to be an Anglo-Saxon word, meaning "vinegar."

"Whilst like a willing pacient I will drinke,
Potions of *Eysell* 'gainst my strong infection."
Sonnet cxi.

"Woo't drinke up *Esile*, eate a Crocodile?"
Hamlet, Act v. 2.

3. Peculiar use of the adjective "obsequious."

"How many a holy and *obsequious* teare
Hath deare religious love stolne from mine eye,
As interest of the dead, which now appeare,
But things remov'd that hidden in there lie!"
Sonnet xxxi.

"The Surviver bound
In filiall Obligation, for some terme
To do *obsequious* Sorrow."—*Hamlet*, i. 2.

4. Use of the word "rack," vapour.

"Anon permit the basest cloudes to ride,
With ougly *rack* on his celestiall face,
And from the for-lorne world his visage hide
Stealing unseene to west with this disgrace."
Sonnet xxxiii.

"That which is now a Horse, even with a thoght
the *racke* dislimes, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water."—*Ant. and Cleopatra*, iv. 12.

"And like this insubstantiall Pageant faded
Leave not a *racke* behinde."—*Tempest*, iv. 1.

5. Employment of the term "rigoll" to denote "a circle, or wreath."

"About the mourning and congealed face
Of that blacke bloud, a watrie *rigoll* goes,
Which seemes to weep upon the tainted place."
Lucrece.

---

the "Lucrece" and the Sonnets, the second edition of the "Venus and Adonis," and the folio edition, of 1623, of the Dramas.

"This is a sleepe,
That from this Golden *Rigoll* hath divorc'd
So many English Kings."
Henry IV., 2nd Part, iv. 4.

6. "Owe" used in the sense of "possess."

"If some suspect of ill maskt not thy show,
Then thou alone kingdomes of hearts shouldst *owe!*"
Sonnet lxx.

"Of all perfections that a man may *owe*."
Love's Labour's Lost, ii. 1.

7. Use of "quote," or "cote," in the sense of "to note."

"Yea, the illiterate that know not how
To cipher what is writ in learned bookes,
Will *cote* my lothsome trespasse in my lookes."
Lucrece.

"What curious eye doth *quote* deformities?"
Romeo and Juliet, i. 4.

8. "Suggested" used for "tempted."

"Perchance his bost of Lucrece Sou'raigntie,
Suggested this proud issue of a King."
Lucrece.

"What Eve? what Serpent hath *suggested* thee,
To make a second fall of cursed man?"
Rich. II. iii. 4.

9. The word "vast" used to signify "a wide waste."

"Who like a late sack't Island *vastlie* stood
Bare and unpeopled, in this fearfull flood."
Lucrece.

"Shooke hands, as over a *Vast;* and embrac'd as it were from the ends of opposed winds."—*Winter's Tale*, i. 1.

10. Peculiar use of the verb "to fall."

"For everie teare he *fals* a Trojan bleeds."—*Lucrece.*

"If that the Earth could teeme with womans teares,
Each drop she *falls*, would prove a Crocodile."
Othello, iv. 1.

11. Employment of the word "foyzon."

"Speake of the spring, and *foyzon* of the yeare,
The one doth shaddow of your beautie show,
The other as your bountie doth appeare,
And you in every blessed shape we know."
Sonnet liii.

"Nature should bring forth
Of its owne kinde, all *foyzon*, all abundance
To feed my innocent people."
Tempest, ii. 1.

12. A quaint expression.

"Why should my heart thinke that a *severall plot*,
Which my heart knowes the wide worlds *common* place?"
Sonnet cxxxvii.

"My lips are no *Common*, though *severall* they be."
Love's Labour 's Lost, ii.

13. "Wood" used in the sense of "mad."

"Life-poysoning pestilence, and frendzies *wood*."
Venus and Adonis.

"And heere am I, and *wood* within this wood."
A Midsummer Night's Dream, ii. 2.

This list might be extended almost indefinitely, and illustrations of particular passages might be adduced; for every student of Shakespeare is aware that the germ of some of the finest portions in many of the dramas may be traced to the poems. Any theory based upon parallel passages must, however, be, in a great measure, delusive. In the case of Bacon and Shakespeare, it cannot do much more than illustrate the influence wielded by one commanding mind over another of almost equal powers, though differently displayed and developed. Did we place any reliance upon such a system, we might, in addition to the foregoing instances, produce a startling array of kindred sentiments and expressions, selected from the poems and the dramas of Shakespeare, which would be sufficient to

convince the most sceptical that they were the productions of one man.

Mr. William Henry Smith has not yet carried his advocacy of his theory so far as to deny that Shakespeare wrote the "Venus and Adonis," the "Lucrece," and the Sonnets; and he is probably aware that he must first destroy Shakespeare's reputation as the author of these masterpieces, before he can hope to deprive him of his glowing honours, as the greatest of dramatic authors. It is impossible for the latest, and we hope the last, traducer of Shakespeare to escape from this dilemma. In the poems we find not only ideas, peculiar turns of thought, strange uses of particular words, and quaint expressions, but adumbrations of character that are more fully developed in the plays. If Mr. William Henry Smith still clings to his theory, let him at once set to work, and not only endeavour to demonstrate, but actually establish beyond risk or possibility of refutation, that Francis Bacon wrote the "Venus and Adonis," the "Lucrece," and the Sonnets, or the ground beneath his feet will be demolished by the aid of his own dearly-prized weapons. These delightful poems—glowing proofs of the mighty powers and evident superiority of their author—rise up in judgment against him; and the literary Don Quixote of the nineteenth century may as well attack windmills with bulrushes, as assail our mighty Shakespeare with his idle reveries.

The theory of parallel passages never can, never did, and never will, admit of the construction Mr. William Henry Smith wishes to put upon it; and if that worthy successor of the narrow-minded critics of the last century, none of whom ventured to question Shakespeare's right to be regarded as the author of these exquisite productions, though they sought to prejudice mankind against him, and to give the world an erroneous idea of his works,—persists in his endeavours to lead young students astray, we shall use it as a cudgel to beat the conceit out of him. Gladly indeed shall we—

"Let it work,
For 'tis the sport, to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petar: and 't shall go hard,
But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them at the moon."

Even had the plays—universally, we were going to say, but we had forgotten that important item of critical humanity, Mr. William Henry Smith, and therefore qualify it by saying,—almost universally allowed to be Shakespeare's, been published anonymously, there is no evidence upon which they could be assigned to Francis Bacon; and, according to the parallel-passage theory, the admirers of Mr. Alexander Smith, the bard of the painful metaphors, and one of the heroes of the new and popular style of elastic verse, might claim for him the authorship of nearly every poem, above the average scale of merit, published during the last half-century.*

If a readiness to make use of the ideas and sentiments of other writers is to give the latest adapter a claim to the proprietorship, we shall speedily have confusion in the court of Parnassus. Let these canons of criticism be once admitted as valid, and good-bye to our old authors: they will speedily be devoured and poured forth in another form; and men will only have to steal skilfully in order to establish a first-rate literary reputation. At any rate, the parallel-passage theory has got Mr. William

* See "Athenæum," Jan. 3, 1857. The process is very simple. Most of our readers will remember Wordsworth's line in his sonnet on Milton:—

"His soul was like a star, and dwelt apart."

Mr. Alexander Smith turns it out gallantly:—

"Alone he dwelt, solitary as a star."

He does not give himself much trouble about the transformation, and scarcely deigns to follow Sheridan's hint, about treating the idea "as gipsies do stolen children,—disfigure them to make 'em pass for their own." This new method may be called poetry with variations.

Henry Smith into difficulty, and he must either abandon it altogether, or prove that to Francis Bacon the world is indebted for the "Venus and Adonis," the "Lucrece," and the Sonnets, to say nothing of some minor poems.

CHAPTER VI.

FACTS CONNECTED WITH THE PUBLICATION OF THE POEMS, WHICH PROVE THAT THEIR AUTHOR WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE WROTE THE DRAMAS.

"Thus then Shakspeare appears, from his Venus and Adonis and Rape of Lucrece alone, apart from all his great works, to have possessed all the conditions of the true poet."—S. T. COLERIDGE.

OUR principal object in launching this small venture upon the wide ocean of literature, is not merely to show the Baconian theory to be both a wicked libel upon the memory of Shakespeare in particular, and a grievous insult to the English nation at large, but to establish, upon the clearest and most intelligible grounds, the identity of William Shakespeare, and to prove by the testimony of his contemporaries, and the evidence of historical documents, that he, and he alone, was the author of those dramas that have long been received as his productions. Upon the internal evidence to be derived from the institution of a careful and rigid comparison between the poems and the dramas, we are not inclined to lay much stress; yet this, as we have before shown, is altogether in favour of our view of the question. We purpose at once proceeding to proofs more palpable; the solemn testimony of which cannot, we humbly imagine, be impugned.

Let us deal with these in the order in which they present themselves to our notice. We pass, with a brief notice, the petition of "the shareholders in the Blackfriars playhouse," dated November, 1589, pleading against the intolerant spirit which sought to deprive them of

their means of subsistence; on which list of sixteen shareholders, the name of William Shakespeare stands twelfth; we cannot now pause to determine whether Edmund Spenser, the author of the "Fairy Queen," could by any possibility have alluded to any other poet but William Shakespeare in the verses we are about to quote, although we believe the affirmative might be very easily established. The stanzas occur in a small volume entitled, "Complaints, containing Sundrie small Poemes of the World's Vanitie," by Edmund Spenser, published in 1591. The book contains several divisions; and in one of these, called "The Teares of the Muses," Thalia bewails the decline of comedy, and, as we believe, the temporary retirement of Shakespeare. These lines have been frequently quoted by commentators, but they are not even now sufficiently known, perhaps because not easily accessible to the generality of readers.

"Where be the sweete delights of learnings treasure,
That wont with Comick sock to beautefie
The painted Theaters, and fill with pleasure
The listners' eyes, and eares with melodie;
In which I late was wont to raine as Queene,
And maske in mirth with Graces well beseene?

O all is gone, and all that goodly glee,
Which wont to be the glorie of gay wits,
Is layd abed, and no where now to see;
And in her roome unseemly Sorrow sits,
With hollow browes and greisly countenaunce,
Marring my joyous gentle dalliaunce.

And him beside sits ugly Barbarisme,
And brutish Ignorance, ycrept of late
Out of dredd darknes of the deep Abysme,
Where being bredd, he light and heaven does hate:
They in the mindes of men now tyrannize,
And the faire Scene with rudenes foule disguize.

All places they with follie have possest,
And with vaine toyes the vulgare entertaine;
But me have banished, with all the rest
That whilome wont to wait upon my traine,

Fine Counterfesaunce,* and unhurtfull Sport,
Delight and Laughter deckt in seemly sort.

All these, and all that els the Comick Stage
With seasoned wit and goodly pleasance graced;
By which man's life in his likest imâge
Was limned forth, are wholly now defaced;
And these sweete wits which wont the like to frame,
Are now despizd, and made a laughing game.

And he the man, whom Nature selfe had made
To mock her selfe, and Truth to imitate,
With kindly counter,† under Mimick shade,
Our pleasant *Willy*, ah is dead of late:
With whom all ioy and iolly meriment
Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.‡

In stead thereof scoffing Scurrilitie,
And scornfull Follie with Contempt is crept,
Rolling in rymes of shameles ribaudrie §
Without regard, or due Decorum kept,
Each idle wit at will presumes to make,
And doth the Learneds taske upon him take.

But that same gentle Spirit, from whose pen
Large streames of honnie and sweete Nectar flowe,
Scorning the boldnes of such base-borne men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashlie throwe;
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,
Than so himselfe to mockerie to sell."

These notices would be sufficient to satisfy ordinary inquirers that by the year 1593 William Shakespeare had, by some means or other, attained a certain degree of celebrity, and that many of his earlier dramas then enjoyed high popularity. The most incredulous cannot deny that the "Venus and Adonis," the first acknowledged work of this great poet's that has come down to us, made its appearance in this eventful year. It was

* *I. e.* counterfeiting.—AIKIN.
† *I. e.* trial of skill.—AIKIN.
‡ *I. e.* drenched, drowned.—AIKIN.
§ *I. e.* ribaldry.—AIKIN.

published in quarto, on the 18th of April, and a few weeks before Christopher Marlowe, by some regarded as the founder of the English drama, lost his life in a duel. A terrible plague had broken out in London during the preceding autumn, and all the theatres were closed by authority. Shakespeare, availing himself of an interval of repose and leisure, prepared his poem for the press. It appeared with the following dedication :—

> "*To the Right Honorable Henrie Wriothesly, Earle of Southampton, and Baron of Titchfield.*
>
> "RIGHT HONOURABLE,—I know not how I shall offend, in dedicating my unpolisht lines to your Lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a proppe to support so weake a burthen ; onely if your Honour seeme but pleased, I account my selfe highlie praysed, and vow to take advantage of all idle houres, till I have honoured you with some graver labour. But if the first heyre of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sory it had so noble a godfather: and never after eare * so barren a land, for feare it yeeld me still so bad a harvest. I leave it to your honourable survey, and your Honor to your heart's content, which I wish may alwayes answere your owne wish, and the world's hopefull expectation. Your Honor's in all dutie—
>
> "WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE."

The use of the expression "first heyre of my invention" has induced certain critics to argue that Shakespeare had not, up to this date, written anything for the stage. Such a conclusion is altogether untenable. In the first place, the "Venus and Adonis" might have been the first-fruits of his youthful fancy, and yet have been composed some time before it was given to the

* *I. e.* to plough.

world. Few authors are fortunate enough to get their earlier poems printed so quickly as they might desire. In the second place, Shakespeare may have regarded this as his first offering at the shrine of the Muses, although he had, previous to its publication, written some dramas. We know, moreover, that the earlier editions of his plays were not sent forth under his sanction; and the "Venus and Adonis" was consequently the first work in the publication of which he took an interest and was concerned. The early copies of the dramas were, as we learn from the folio of 1623, "diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors that exposed them." Thus, in every respect, the "Venus and Adonis" was entitled to be regarded as the first heir of the poet's invention; and we can readily imagine that Shakespeare, finding his occupation gone, or at any rate temporarily interrupted, on account of the plague, brought his early poem forth from its concealment, revised it, and gave it to the world as the freshest offering of his fervent genius—the first-fruits of his youthful labours, his first work.

This is the view of the question taken, though not on precisely the same grounds, by two of the most intelligent of the Shakesperian critics of this age,—J. Payne Collier and Charles Knight. Their opinion may be considered as conclusive. Mr. Collier remarks (Life of Shakespeare, p. cxiv.):—

"With regard to productions unconnected with the stage, there are several pieces among his scattered poems, and some of his sonnets, that indisputably belong to an early part of his life. A young man, so gifted, would not, and could not, wait until he was five or six and twenty before he made considerable and most successful attempts at poetical composition; and we feel morally certain that 'Venus and Adonis' was in being anterior to Shakespeare's quitting Stratford. It bears all the

marks of youthful vigour, of strong passion, of luxuriant imagination, together with a force and originality of expression which betoken the first efforts of a great mind, not always well regulated in its taste: it seems to have been written in the open air of a fine country like Warwickshire, with all the freshness of the recent impression of natural objects; and we will go so far as to say, that we do not think even Shakespeare himself could have produced it, in the form it bears, after he had reached the age of forty. It was quite new in its class, being founded upon no model, either ancient or modern: nothing like it had been attempted before, and nothing comparable to it was produced afterwards. Thus, in 1593, he might call it, in the dedication to Lord Southampton, 'the first heir of his invention' in a double sense, not merely because it was the first printed, but because it was the first written of his productions."

Charles Knight comes to nearly the same conclusion, which he establishes in the most satisfactory manner. He says,—

"But at a period when the exercise of the poetical power in connection with the stage was scarcely held amongst the learned and the polite in itself to be poetry, Shakspere vindicated his reputation by the publication of the 'Venus and Adonis.' It was, he says, 'the first heir of my invention.' There may be a doubt whether Shakspere meant to say literally that this was the first poetical work that he had produced; or whether he held, in deference to some critical opinions, that his dramatic productions could not be classed amongst 'the heirs of invention.' We think that he meant to use the words literally; and that he used them at a period when he might assume, without vanity, that he had taken his rank amongst the poets of his time. He dedicates to the Earl of Southampton something that had not before been

given to the world. He calls his verses 'unpolished lines;' he vows to take advantage of all idle hours, till he had honoured the young patron of the Muses with 'some graver labour.' But *invention* was received then, as it was afterwards, as the highest quality of the poet. Dryden says,—'A poet is a maker, as the word signifies; and he who cannot make, that is *invent*, hath his name for nothing.'* We consider, therefore, that 'my invention' is not the language of one unknown to fame. He was exhibiting the powers which he possessed upon a different instrument than that to which the world was accustomed; but the world knew that the power existed. We employ the word *genius* always with reference to the inventive or creative faculty. Substitute the word genius for invention, and the expression used by Shakspere sounds like arrogance. But the substitution may indicate that the actual expression could not have been used by one who came forward for the first time to claim the honours of the poet. It has been argued from this expression, that Shakspere had produced nothing original before the 'Venus and Adonis'—that up to the period of its publication, in 1593, he was only a repairer of the works of other

* This critic might have gone to an earlier source, even in our own literature, for this idea. George Puttenham, in his "Arte of English Poesie," a quaint work, published in 1589, and one of the earliest critical treatises in our language, says:—"A Poet is as much to say as a maker. And our English name well conformes with the Greeke word: for of ποιεῖν, to make, they call a maker *Poeta*. Such as (by way of resemblance and reverently) we may say of God: who without any travell to his divine imagination, made all the world of nought, nor also by any paterne or mould as the Platonicks with their Idees do phantastically suppose. Even so the very Poet makes and contrives out of his owne braine, both the verse and matter of his poeme, and not by any foreine copie or example, as doth the translator, who therefore may well be sayd a versifier, but not a Poet."—(Book i. chap. i.) The treatise is worthy of perusal, as a curious specimen of the literature of the Elizabethan period.

men. We hold that the expression implies the direct contrary."*

The success of the new poem was complete; the second edition appeared in 1594, the third in 1596, the fourth in 1600, and the fifth in 1602; and but few alterations occurred in these different editions; which shows that what Shakespeare published under his own direction, was given to the world in a proper shape.

"Lucrece" followed, on the 1st of May, 1594, and was also highly successful; the fourth edition appeared in the year 1600. It was, like its predecessor, dedicated to the Earl of Southampton.

"The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end; whereof this Pamphlet without beginning, is but a superfluous Moity.† The warrant I have of your Honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored Lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours, what I have to doe is yours, being part in all I have devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duety would shew greater, meanetime, as it is, it is bound to your Lordship; to whom I wish long life still lengthened with all happinesse. Your Lordship's in all duety, "WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE."

These dedications are, as Halliwell sagaciously observes, "precious fragments, the only letters of Shakespeare that have descended to our times." Their value is enhanced by the attacks made from time to time upon the character and writings of the poet; for were it not for such evidences, which cannot be got rid of, the detractors of Shakespeare would have everything their own way. They are both addressed to Henry, third earl of Southampton. A young nobleman, who, although he had not at that time attained his majority, received such homage

* A Biography, book ii. chap. iv. p. 361. † *I. e.* part.

from a rising poet, must have been a man of some account. It is fitting that we inquire into his antecedents and pretensions. He has, moreover, been appealed to by Mr. William Henry Smith, who states correctly, that Bacon "was on terms of intimacy with Lord Southampton, the avowed patron of Shakespeare."*

The evidence of this young peer will therefore be valuable; and before we summon him into the witness-box, we may as well endeavour to glean a few particulars concerning the man.

Henry Wriothesley was born on the 6th of October, 1573. He was a second son, but his father and elder brother died before he had attained his twelfth year; for on the 11th of December, 1585, he was entered on the books of St. John's College, Cambridge, as "Earl of Southampton." Towards the end of the sixteenth century, he served against the Spaniards, with great gallantry, both on land and sea. He became involved in the Earl of Essex's conspiracy, if the affair can be thus designated, and for this he was tried in 1601, and found guilty of high treason. His honours, and even his life, were declared forfeit, and he languished some time in the Tower. Soon after the accession of James the First, in 1603, he was released, restored to his title and estates, and made a Knight of the Garter. Sometimes basking in the beams of royal favour, and at others under a cloud, he outlived the poet, dying on the 10th of November, 1624.

Such is a brief summary of his eventful history. Let us now search for evidence as to character and qualifications. Camden,† referring to the title, says, "King Edward VI., in the first year of his reign, conferred that honour upon Thomas Wriotheosley, Lord Chancellour of England; and his grandson Henry, by Henry his son,

* Pamphlet, p. 10. † Britannia; edit. 1695, p. 128.

now enjoys that title; who, in his younger years, has armed the nobility of his birth with the ornaments of learning and military arts, that in his riper age he may employ them in the service of his king and country." This is honourable testimony to the worth of the friend of Bacon and Shakespeare; and although we might produce much more to the same effect, we shall content ourselves by quoting the remarks of Edmund Lodge. That author says :—

"Of the life of this nobleman, who was the third Earl of Southampton of his name, some pains have been of late years taken to collect the scattered circumstances. History could scarcely have avoided mentioning a man who had been deeply and actively engaged in Essex's singular conspiracy, and had suffered therefore a severe punishment, but it has gone little further. He was however, not only the friend of Essex, but the patron of Shakspeare; more than one of whose numerous commentators, unwilling wholly to lose their labour, have furnished us with many miscellaneous notices of Southampton, which occurred in their almost fruitless researches on the peculiar subject of that patronage. He was a man of no very unusual character, in whom several fine qualities were shadowed by some important defects. His understanding seems to have been lively and acute; and his acquired talents united to a competent erudition, an extensive and correct taste for polite letters, and the most highly finished manners. His friendships were ardent and lasting; his personal courage almost proverbial; and his honour wholly unsuspected: but his mind was fickle and unsteady; a violent temper engaged him in frequent quarrels, and in enmities injurious to his best interests; and he was wholly a stranger to that wary circumspection which is commonly dignified by the name of prudence."*

* Portraits of Illustrious Personages (Bohn's Illustrated Library), vol. iii. p. 155.

His very vices, as well as his virtues, plead trumpet-tongued against the accusation brought against him by Mr. William Henry Smith, that he was privy to one of the most infamous literary deceptions ever practised. He was imprudent; therefore not a man to be trusted with an important secret: his "honour was wholly unsuspected;" therefore he was not the kind of person to dabble in such wretched impostures. Yet he was intimate with Bacon, and the patron of Shakespeare, and must consequently have been acquainted with the true state of the case. We have seen what the poet thought of him, and letters have come down to us in which Bacon addresses Lord Southampton in the most flattering and affectionate manner. Had Bacon been the author of the dramas of Shakespeare, Henry, Earl of Southampton, must, as Mr. William Henry Smith admits, have been privy to all the particulars. Not only did he favour Shakespeare in every possible manner; not only did he either lend him money, or present him with a handsome token of his approbation, but he even interested himself in the affairs of his theatre, as a letter, discovered by Mr. J. Payne Collier, amongst Lord Ellesmere's manuscripts at Bridgewater House, will show. This epistle bears the signature "H. S.," and is certainly a copy of one written by the Earl of Southampton in 1608, and addressed either to Lord Ellesmere, or to some person in authority. In that year the Lord Mayor and Aldermen endeavoured to expel the King's players from the Blackfriars. In their behalf the Earl of Southampton wrote:—

"My verie honored Lord.—The manie good offices I haue receiued at your Lordship's hands, which ought to make me backward in asking further favors, onely imbouldens me to require more in the same kinde. Your Lordship will be warned howe hereafter you graunt anie sute, seeing it draweth on more and greater demaunds. This which now presseth is to request your Lordship, in all you can, to be good to the poore players

of the Black Fryers, who call them selves by authoritie the servaunts of his Majestie, and aske for the protection of their most graceous Maister and Sovereigne in this the tyme of their troble. They are threatened by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, never friendly to their calling, with the destruction of their meanes of livelihood, by the pulling downe of their plaiehouse, which is a private theatre, and hath never given occasion of anger by anie disorders. These bearers are two of the chiefe of the companie; one of them by name Richard Burbidge, who humblie sueth for your Lordship's kinde helpe, for that he is a man famous as our English Roscius, one who fitteth the action to the word, and the word to the action most admirably. By the exercise of his qualitye, industry, and good behaviour, he hath be come possessed of the Blacke Fryers playhouse, which hath bene imployed for playes sithence it was builded by his Father, now nere 50 yeres agone.* The other is a man no whitt lesse deserving favor, and my especiall friende, till of late an actor of good account in the companie, now a sharer in the same, and writer of some of our best English playes, which, as your Lordship knoweth, were most singularly liked of Quene Elizabeth, when the companie was called uppon to performe before her Maiestie at Court at Christmas and Shrovetide. His most gracious Maiestie King James alsoe, since his coming to the crowne, hath extended his royal favour to the companie in divers waies, and at sundrie tymes. This other hath to name William Shakespeare, and they are both of one countie, and indeede allmost of one towne: both are right famous in their qualityes, though it longeth not to your Lo. gravitie and wisedome to resort unto the places where they are wont to delight the publique eare. Their trust and sute nowe is not to bee molested in their way of life, whereby they maintaine themselves and their wives and

* This is a slight error; as the theatre had only been built about five-and-thirty years.

families, (being both maried and of good reputation) as well as the widowes and orphanes of some of their dead fellows.—Your Lo. most bounden at com.

"Copia vera." "H. S.*"

Attempts have been made to cast suspicions upon the genuineness of this remarkable document; and Mr. Halliwell, in his new and magnificent folio edition of Shakespeare, does not accord to it that free and genial reception which it undoubtedly deserves. This gentleman seems to have forgotten that since its publication many of the new facts which it revealed have been corroborated in a most unexpected manner. The discovery afforded the indefatigable Mr. Collier no mean satisfaction, and he was perfectly justified in believing that it would prove an acceptable offering to the student and admirer of Shakespeare.

The arguments in favour of and against the genuineness of the document in question have been very fairly investigated and weighed by Charles Knight, who sums up in the following terms :—

"We have stated frankly, and without reserve, the objections to the authenticity of this document which have presented themselves to our mind. It is better to state these fully and fairly, than to 'hint a doubt.' Looking at the decided character of the external evidence as to the discovery, and taking into consideration the improbability of a spurious paper having been smuggled into the company of the Bridgewater documents, we are inclined to confide in it. But, apart from the interesting character of the letter, and the valuable testimony which it gives to the nature of the intercourse between Southampton and Shakspere—'my especial friend,'—we might lay it aside with reference to its furnishing any new materials for the life of the poet, with the exception of

* This letter was first published in "New Facts regarding the Life of Shakespeare," by J. Payne Collier, 1835, p. 32.

the statement that he and Burbage were 'both of one county.' Confiding in it, as we are anxious to do, we accept it as a valuable illustration of that life. We have on several occasions referred to the letter of H. S.; and in this examination we can have no wish to neutralize our own inferences from its genuineness. These, however, in this biography, have reference only to the assertion, 1st, That Burbage and Shakspere were of one county, and almost of one town: This was a conjecture made by Malone. 2nd. That there was deep friendship between Southampton and Shakspere: This is an old traditionary belief, supported by the dedications of 'Venus and Adonis,' and the 'Lucrece.' 3rd. That Shakspere left the stage previous to 1608: This differs little from the prevailing opinion, that he quitted it before 1605, founded upon his name not appearing to a play of Ben Jonson in that year."*

This may be regarded as conclusive, and is another fatal blow to Mr. William Henry Smith's preposterous theory; to all, in fact, who wish to tear the poet's wreath from his benign and august brow. Lord Southampton must have known the particulars of the gigantic literary fraud which, according to Mr. William Henry Smith, Bacon and Shakespeare had concocted between them, and would not, as a man of honour, have gone out of his way to pen several unblushing falsehoods, and send them to some person high in authority. Lord Southampton is the witness to whom Mr. William Henry Smith appeals; and this is his testimony on three points. 1st, that Shakespeare not only deserved favour, but was his "ESPECIAL FRIEND." 2ndly, that Shakespeare was "till of late an actor of good account in the companie, now a sharer in the same:" and 3rdly, that he was the "WRITER OF SOME OF OUR BEST ENGLISH PLAYES, which, as your lordship

* William Shakspere. A Biography. Book ii. chap. x. note, p. 500.

knoweth, were most singularly liked of Queen Elizabeth." Never was witness summoned who gave more conclusive evidence. Shakespeare's character, pursuits, and his triumphs, are detailed in a few pithy sentences.

This letter was, we know from internal evidence, written in 1608; and if Bacon had composed, or even lent his assistance in the composition of these dramas, as Mr. William Henry Smith supposes, the Earl of Southampton, the friend of both Bacon and Shakespeare, must have been acquainted with the fact, and he would have recoiled from lending his name to prop up a falsehood, more particularly one that circumstances might at any time have unveiled. This evidence settles the matter. It not only shows the Baconian theory to be a snare and a delusion, for that would be but a questionable victory; it establishes the fact, that William Shakespeare, and William Shakespeare alone, was the author of those delightful productions which have added a charm to the existence of so many generations of his countrymen.

Of Shakespeare's sonnets and minor poems it is scarcely necessary to speak. They were published with his name; and had it been otherwise, the internal evidences they contain of having proceeded from the same mental laboratory which produced the "Venus and Adonis," the "Lucrece," and the dramas, would enable us to assign them to him without the slightest hesitation.

Two very erroneous impressions are prevalent amongst many who have not made any deep researches into our literature and its history; the one being, that Shakespeare was not much esteemed as an author in his own day, and the other, that his poems are, on the whole, very inferior productions. As these are altogether unfounded, we may render a service to some of our readers by adducing evidence, of the best and simplest kind, showing the actual state of the case.

William Shakespeare was frequently mentioned by his contemporaries; but we do not intend to refer categori-

cally to all these numerous allusions. We prefer quoting the remarks of an author entitled to consideration, who gives the modern reader a fair idea of the estimation in which the poet was held about 1598, when he was in his thirty-fifth year. If people will reflect upon the wide difference between the state of literature in the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and call to mind how few celebrated men in the present day, with all the facilites which they enjoy for the circulation of their productions, achieve distinction before completing their thirty-fifth year, they will have a better conception of the real character of Shakespeare's fame, and of the importance of the position which he had attained, when even quite a young man. It has long been the fashion among certain classes of critics to bolster up the false notion that Shakespeare, as an author, was comparatively unknown in his own day, and that his merits were only recognized after a tedious lapse of time. Nothing can be more directly at variance with the truth, as we learn from evidence that is above suspicion. In 1598, Francis Meres, a clergyman, educated at Cambridge, put forth a small critical work, bearing the following quaint title, "Palladis Tamia; Wit's Treasury, being the second Part of Wit's Commonwealth;" and in this book Shakespeare is honourably noticed. Our poet is not only mentioned several times by name, but always with high commendation. One instance will suffice to show this. Meres says :—

"As the soule of *Euphorbus* was thought to live in *Pythagoras* :* so the sweete wittie-soule of *Ovid* lives in

* For the benefit of readers not versed in classical allusions, the following explanation from "Smith's Classical Dictionary" is appended :—"Euphorbus, a son of Panthous, and brother of Hyperenor, who was one of the bravest among the Trojans. He was the first who wounded Patroclus, but was afterwards slain by Menelaus, who subsequently dedicated the shield of Euphorbus in the temple of Hera, near Mycenæ. It is a well-known story, that Pythagoras asserted that he had once been the Trojan Euphorbus; that from a

mellifluous and honytongued *Shakespeare*, witnes his *Venus* and *Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c.

"As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines : so *Shakespeare* among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage ; for Comedy, witnes his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*,* his *Love labors lost*, his *Love labours wonne*,† his *Midsummers Night Dreame*, and his *Merchant of Venice :* for Tragedy his *Richard the Second*, *Richard the Third*, *Henry the Fourth*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*.

"As *Epius Stolo*‡ said, that the Muses would speake with *Plautus* tongue if they would speak Latin : so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine filed phrase, if they would speake English."§

Francis Meres, the poet's contemporary, states explicitly that William Shakespeare was the author both of the poems and of the plays. The critic even goes farther than this, and enumerates certain poems and plays that Shakespeare had written. The manner in which this is done, justifies the conclusion that Meres was perfectly well informed upon the subject. Shakespeare's Sonnets were not published until 1609, yet in 1598 he speaks of them confidently as "his sugred Sonnets among his private friends." Thus Shakespeare was recognized by his contemporaries as a poet, and elevated by them to the highest rank.

A reputation of this kind is not easily achieved ;

Trojan he had become an Ionian ; and from a warrior a philosopher." Pythagoras was the author of that system the principal feature of which is a belief in the transmigration of souls.

* Comedy of Errors.

† All's Well that Ends Well.

‡ The grammarian L. Ælius Stilo used to say, and Varro adopted his words, "that the Muses would use the language of Plautus if they were to speak Latin."—*Smith's Classical Dictionary.*

§ Page 281.

certainly very few men accomplish so much at an early age. How long this eulogium might have been written previous to publication, we have no means of judging; but we do know that in 1598 Shakespeare was publicly recognized as the author of—

COMEDIES.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona.
The Comedy of Errors.
Love's Labour's Lost.
All's Well that Ends Well.
The Midsummer Night's Dream.
The Merchant of Venice.

HISTORICAL TRAGEDIES.

Richard II.
Richard III.
Henry IV.
King John.
Titus Andronicus.

TRAGEDY.

Romeo and Juliet.

POEMS.

Venus and Adonis.
Lucrece.
Sonnets.

Fifteen such works at the age of thirty-five were indeed sufficient to constitute a glorious reputation, even had their author then relinquished his pen and abandoned the Muses for ever. Nor does Meres wish his readers to suppose that he had enumerated all the works which, at that early period in his career, our great dramatist had produced. The critic

merely notices these fifteen as specimens of what Shakespeare had done ; we possess positive evidence that others, not referred to in this list, were in existence at that time, and may form some conception of the manner in which he had laboured, and of the extraordinary reputation that he had achieved. Even the fame of his Sonnets, which were not published until eleven years later, had got abroad, and the way in which Meres speaks of them would of itself suffice to prove that all the productions of this master-mind were in his own day sought after and esteemed. We have pointed out the friendship that existed between the Earl of Southampton and Shakespeare, and the honourable mention made by this well-known peer of the manager, actor, and poet, to a third person ; we have referred to the publication and the success of the poems, and adduced the testimony of a contemporary,—an impartial writer, by whom Shakespeare is recognized as the author of poems, sonnets, and dramas ; and we imagine that few will feel inclined to cavil at the conclusions which we draw from these matters; namely, that it is utterly impossible that Bacon could have written the dramas, or that any person but William Shakespeare is to be regarded as their author. No writer enrolled in our literary annals can be more clearly entitled to the proud position he has gained, than this extraordinary man.

Those who have studied these various productions of his superior and commanding mind, in that reverential manner in which everybody ought to approach the consideration of such masterpieces of human genius, will not experience the slightest difficulty in believing them to have emanated from one gifted being. By indisputable evidence, they are assigned to Shakespeare, and are indeed the credentials by which he has won the homage of successive generations. If Mr. William Henry Smith be indeed in search of the wonderful, we can direct his inquiring gaze to a marvel, upon which he seems to have

stumbled quite unawares. His reasoning faculties must be below the average, or he would long since have detected this, lying in his path, and almost inviting observation.

The wonder would be, not that William Shakespeare should have produced several works, kindred in beauty and character, but that, after having taken mankind captive by the magnitude of his powers, after having, at a comparatively early age, written poems of the highest order of merit, he should suddenly abandon the cultivation of this particular and glorious gift, and cease to ravish the world by the sweet strains of his melodious lyre. Now this is the marvel that Mr. William Henry Smith has raised up; and it is one inseparable from his theory. It would be harder to believe this, even had we very strong evidence in its support, than that in the "Venus and Adonis," and the "Lucrece," may be recognized the first soarings of that surpassing genius, which reached its fairest development in these beautiful creations of the human mind, "Hamlet," "King Lear," "Macbeth," and "Othello."

Attempts have been frequently made to depreciate the poems, and to under-rate their merits. The unprejudiced reader will admit that they display much of the same wonderful power that constitutes the excellence of the dramas. They are superior to other poems of the kind, just as the dramas excel all similar compositions. The criticism upon the subject, of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is not only just, but profound: he felt what he wrote, and had, moreover, a genuine appreciation of Shakespeare. He says:—

"The subject of the 'Venus and Adonis' is unpleasing; but the poem itself is for that very reason the more illustrative of Shakspeare. There are men who can write passages of deepest pathos, and even sublimity, on circumstances personal to themselves and stimulative of their own passions; but they are not, therefore, on this account poets. Read that magnificent burst of woman's patriotism

and exultation, Deborah's song of victory; it is glorious, but nature is the poet there. It is quite another matter to become all things, and yet remain the same,—to make the changeful god be felt in the river, the lion, and the flame;—this it is, that is the true imagination. Shakspeare writes in this poem, as if he were of another planet, charming you to gaze on the movements of Venus and Adonis, as you would on the twinkling dances of two vernal butterflies.

"Finally, in this poem, and the 'Rape of Lucrece,' Shakspeare gave ample proof of his possession of a most profound, energetic, and philosophical mind, without which he might have pleased, but could not have been a great dramatic poet. Chance, and the necessity of his genius, combined to lead him to the drama, his proper province: in his conquest of which we should consider both the difficulties which opposed him, and the advantages by which he was assisted."*

* Notes and Lectures upon Shakspeare and some of the Old Poets and Dramatists, vol. i. p. 57.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FOLIO EDITION OF 1623, AND THE EVIDENCE IT AFFORDS RESPECTING THE QUESTION OF ITS AUTHORSHIP.

"My book hath been so much my Pleasure, and bringeth daily to me more Pleasure, and more, than in respect of it, all other Pleasures in very deed, be but Trifles and Troubles unto me."
ROGER ASCHAM.

SHOULD the rash, absurd, and disgraceful accusations of Mr. William Henry Smith against the character, and the strictures of other self-satisfied critics and cavillers upon the works, of William Shakespeare have the effect of making the great majority of the English people better acquainted with the facts clearly established concerning the poet's life, and the circumstances under which both his poems and his dramas were given to the world, good will decidedly grow out of evil. The more we know of Shakespeare as a man and an author, the higher does our veneration rise; the better reasons we have for exclaiming, in the words of Dryden, "I love Shakespeare." Assuredly the English people do not yet know what they owe to this incomparable genius, do not actually understand the real extent of their obligations.

In seeking to direct attention to the dedicatory epistle, preface, commendatory verses, &c., prefixed to the folio edition of 1623, we feel that we are conferring a boon upon many persons who may not hitherto have been able to meet with this information in a cheap and convenient form. They are found for the most part in voluminous and expensive editions, but have not, so far as the author is aware, been circulated in the cheap standard literature of the day. Familiarity with these interesting documents

ought to form the rudiments, so to speak, of our knowledge of Shakespeare. Every reader of his works should know something of the manner in which the first folio was issued; of the internal evidence it contained of being a genuine work: and these are the matters we now desire to investigate. Everybody who has been engaged in researches upon this subject is aware that four folio editions of the dramas of William Shakespeare were published during the seventeenth century, in the following years: 1623, 1632, 1664, and 1685. To the former of these the attention of our readers will be principally directed, and the remaining three may be dismissed with a passing notice.

The second edition, which appeared in 1632, was little more than a reprint of the first folio. It contained, however, the following testimony to the merits of Shakespeare, from the pen of England's greatest epic poet,—John Milton. The lines are valuable evidence. They show the opinion of this largely-gifted man, with reference to the dramatist; and if taken in connection with others written at a later period in Milton's life, prove that, in spite of his religious prejudices, and his objections to stage performances, he had a thorough appreciation of Shakespeare, and recognized his true position amongst the literary worthies of England.

"*An Epitaph on the admirable Dramaticke Poet,* W. SHAKESPEARE.

"What needs my Shakespeare for his honour'd bones,
The labour of an Age, in piled stones,
Or that his hallow'd Reliques should be hid
Under a starre-ypointing Pyramid?
Deare Sonne of Memory, great Heire of Fame,
What needst thou such dull witnesse of thy Name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thy selfe a lasting Monument:
For whil'st to th' shame of slow-endevouring Art,
Thy easie numbers flow, and that each part*

* This has since been changed to "heart."

> Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued Booke,
> Those Delphicke Lines with deepe Impression tooke
> Then thou our fancy of her selfe bereaving,
> Dost make us Marble with too much conceiving,
> And so Sepulcher'd in such pompe dost lie
> That Kings for such a Tombe would wish to die."

If we are to receive this as a fair account of the reputation achieved by the poet,—and we must remember that these lines were published only sixteen years after his death,—what will become of all the vapourings of his numerous detractors? Shall we credit what his assailants rashly assert, in preference to the solemn testimony of John Milton, a man not inclined to favour either the drama or its productions? Again, a few years later Milton cannot refrain from offering another tribute to his illustrious predecessor, whose works had made such a deep impression upon his mind. In "L'Allegro," he says :—

> "Then to the well-trod stage anon,
> If Jonson's learned sock be on,
> Or sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child,
> Warble his native wood-notes wild."

This is collateral evidence of the highest order.

The third impression in folio appeared in 1664, and it contained a great innovation, being no less than seven additional plays, some of which had, indeed, been previously traditionally ascribed to Shakespeare, and others which had merely appeared anonymously, or with the initials "W. S." These plays were thus inscribed on the title-page :—

1. *Pericles, Prince of Tyre.*
2. *The London Prodigall.*
3. *The History of Thomas Ld. Cromwell.*
4. *Sir John Oldcastle Lord Cobham.*
5. *The Puritan Widow.*
6. *A Yorkshire Tragedy.*
7. *The Tragedy of Locrine.*

In the composition of some of these Shakespeare may

have lent a helping hand; but that the greater portion of them were the productions of other authors, few can doubt. Moreover, the fact that they were not given to the world in the first folio, which was, as we shall see presently, issued by authority, must be conclusive. Shakespeare did not consider them worthy of acknowledgment: whatever share he may have had in their composition, cannot now be determined; and we possess enough, stamped with the impress of his mighty powers, and acknowledged by himself, to make us, comparatively speaking, careless about the authorship of these rather indifferent specimens.

The fourth impression of the dramas in folio, published in 1685, was merely a reprint of the edition of 1664; so we come at once to the great Shakesperian fountain, and source of our knowledge and delight, the folio edition of 1623. This was issued just seven years after the death of its author, whom we hope to convince our readers was none other than William Shakespeare. The title-page of this edition contained a portrait of William Shakespeare, in itself a very significant fact, and one quite decisive enough to upset any absurd notions respecting the claims of Bacon to its authorship. The work was thus described:—"Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies. Published according to the true originall copies. London. Printed by Isaac Jaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623." On the opposite page, the following oft-quoted lines by Ben Jonson appear. They are addressed "to the Reader:"—

"This Figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Graver had a strife
With Nature, to out-doo the life:
O, could he but have drawne his Wit
As well in Brasse, as he hath hit
His Face; the Print would then surpasse
All, that was ever writ in Brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.—B. I."

The witnesses summoned by the concoctors of the gigantic fraud which Mr. William Henry Smith would have us believe was perpetrated with reference to these dramas, are certainly of quite an opposite character to what we should have anticipated. They were all honourable persons, although the work they had in hand was the most dishonourable and ignominious that could well be conceived. Strange infatuation! that the workers in this iniquity, contrary to the general rule, should have been high-minded men, of birth and position. First and foremost amongst them stands Ben Jonson,—"rare Ben Jonson," the bosom friend, the fellow dramatist, the constant companion of Shakespeare. Ben Jonson knew the bard of Avon well; he appreciated his merits, and comprehended his mighty superiority, as we learn from many of his sayings and criticisms that have escaped the ravages of time; and his evidence is so valuable that we shall avail ourselves of it anon. But Ben Jonson also knew Bacon—the man and the author—and understood what a mighty figure he made in the realms of Literature. In "Timber, or Discoveries," he says :—

"*I have* ever observed it to have been the office of a wise Patriot, among the greatest affairs of the *State*, to take care of the Commonwealth of Learning. For Schools, they are the Seminaries of State: and nothing is worthier the study of a Statesman, than that part of the Republick, which we call the advancement of Letters. Witness the case of Julius Cæsar, who, in the heat of the civil war, writ his books of Analogy, and dedicated them to Tully. This made the late Lord St. Alban entitle his work, *Novum Organum*. Which though by the most of superficial men, who cannot get beyond the title of Nominals, it is not penetrated, nor understood: it really openeth all defects of Learning, whatsoever, and is a book,

Qui longum noto scriptori porriget ævum.

My conceit of his Person was never increased toward

him, by his place, or honours. But I have, and do reverence him for the greatness that was only proper to himself, in that he seemed to me ever, by his work, one of the greatest men, and most worthy of admiration, that had been in many Ages. In his adversity I ever prayed that God would give him strength: for Greatness he could not want. Neither could I condole in a word or syllable for him; as knowing no accident could do harm to virtue; but rather help to make it manifest."

Most assuredly Ben Jonson would not have penned the commendatory verses upon William Shakespeare which we before quoted, nor have written this eulogium on Francis Bacon, when both of these great men were in their graves, had they committed the vile fraud with which, after more than two centuries of honourable renown, they are so unjustly charged. The irritable jealousy of Jonson's nature would have exploded at the great wrong done to him and others, and he would have burst forth in an eloquent invective against both the transgressors.

Let us proceed to consider evidence of a similar kind that is crowding upon us. On turning to the next page, we encounter "the Epistle Dedicatorie." It is thus addressed and worded:—

> "*To the most noble and incomparable paire of Brethren, William Earle of Pembroke, &c. Lord Chamberlaine to the King's most excellent Maiesty, and Philip Earle of Montgomery, &c. Gentleman of his Maiestie's Bed-Chamber. Both Knights of the most noble order of the Garter and our singular good Lords.*

"RIGHT HONOURABLE,—Whilst we studie to be thankful in our particular, for the many favors we have received from your L. L. we are falne upon the ill fortune, to mingle two the most diverse things that can bee, feare, and

rashnesse; rashnesse in the enterprize, and feare of the successe. For, when we valew the places your H. H. sustaine, we cannot but know their dignity greater, then to descend to the reading of these trifles: and, while we name them trifles, we have depriv'd our selves of the defence of our Dedication. But since your L. L. have beene pleas'd to thinke these trifles something, heeretofore; and have prosequuted both them, and their Authour living, with so much favour: we hope, that (they outliving him, and he not having the fate, common with some, to be exequutor to his owne writings) you will use the like indulgence toward them, you have done unto their parent. There is a great difference, whether any Booke choose his Patrones, or finde them: This hath done both. For, so much were your L. L. likings of the severall parts, when they were acted, as before they were published, the volume ask'd to be yours. We have but collected them, and done an office to the dead, to procure his Orphanes, Guardians; without ambition either of selfe-profit, or fame: onely to keep the memory of so worthy a Friend, and Fellow alive, as was our Shakespeare, by humble offer of his playes, to your most noble patronage. Wherein, as we have justly observed, no man to come neere your L. L. but with a kind of religious addresse; it hath bin the height of our care, who are the Presenters, to make the present worthy of your H. H. by the perfection. But, there we must also crave our abilities to be consider'd, my Lords. We cannot go beyond our owne powers. Country hands reach foorth milke, creame, fruites, or what they have: and many Nations (we have heard) that had not gummes and incense, obtained their requests with a leavened Cake. It was no fault to approch their Gods, by what meanes they could: And the most, though meanest, of things are made more precious, when they are dedicated to Temples. In that name therefore, we most humbly consecrate to your H. H. these remaines of your servant Shakespeare; that what delight is in them, may

be ever your L. L. the reputation his, and the fault ours, if any be committed, by a payre so caerfull to shew their gratitude both to the living, and the dead, as is

"Your Lordshippes' most bounden,
"JOHN HEMINGE.
"HENRY CONDELL."

Our readers will naturally enough ask who the noblemen were, thus freely appealed to; and what kind of persons put forth the appeal? The answer is simple enough: the former were amongst the highest in the land, and the latter were just those very individuals most intimately acquainted with the private life and affairs of the poet, for whose works they besought patronage and favour. It will be sufficient for our present purpose to obtain some particulars concerning one of the noblemen thus addressed, the highest in rank, station, and authority; and having satisfied ourselves upon this point, to pass on to other matters.

The most distinguished of the noble pair who are said to have treated the author of these dramas with so much favour, while living, was William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, justly regarded as the glory of his age. His mother was Mary, the sister of that true mirror of chivalry, Sir Philip Sydney. She died in 1621, and Ben Jonson, in seeking to do honour to her memory, composed one of the most beautiful epitaphs in any language:—

"Underneath this marble hearse
Lies the subject of all verse:
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother:
Death, ere thou hast slain another,
Wise, and fair, and good as she,
Time shall throw a dart at thee."

In 1609 Lord Pembroke was appointed governor of Portsmouth, and in 1615 he was made Lord Chamberlain of the household. He was also elected Chancellor of the University of Oxford, and enjoyed the confidence

of all classes of the community. Wood says, "His mind was purely heroic, often stout, but never disloyal."* That biographer continues :—"He was not only a great favourer of learned and ingenious men, but was himself learned;" and he was well known as the author of several small poems. He died in 1630. In Clarendon's magnificent Portrait-Gallery this nobleman occupies a most prominent position. Thus is he delineated :—

"William, Earl of Pembroke, was a man of another mould and making, and of another fame and reputation with all men, being the most universally loved and esteemed of any man of that age; and having a great office in the court, he made the court itself better esteemed, and more reverenced in the country. And as he had a great number of friends of the best men, so no man had ever the wickedness to avow himself to be his enemy. He was a man very well bred, and of excellent parts, and a graceful speaker upon any subject, having a good proportion of learning, and a ready wit to apply it, and enlarge upon it; of a pleasant and facetious humour, and a disposition affable, generous, and magnificent. He was master of a great fortune from his ancestors, and had a great addition by his wife, another daughter and heir of the Earl of Shrewsbury, which he enjoyed during his life, she outliving him : but all served not his expense, which was only limited by his great mind, and occasions to use it nobly.

* * * * *

He was a great lover of his country, and of the religion and justice, which he believed could only support it; and his friendships were only with men of those principles. And as his conversation was most with men of the most pregnant parts and understanding, so towards any who needed support or encouragement, though unknown, if fairly recommended to him, he was very liberal. And sure never man was planted in a court, that was fitter

* Athenæ Oxonienses.

for that soil, or brought better qualities with him to purify that air."*

These are gracious praises; and, to say nothing of his brother Philip, who was associated with him in this dedicatory epistle, it hardly seems possible that Bacon would have allowed this insult to have been offered to a nobleman of Lord Pembroke's influence and authority, had he really been the author of those dramas then, according to Mr. William Henry Smith's view of the case, palmed off upon the world as the productions of William Shakespeare.

It must be noticed, that this is no simple complimentary dedication. The writers state plainly that the Earl of Pembroke had favoured the author of these plays while living,—that he liked the several parts when acted; thus signifying that he and all the world were well acquainted with the fact of their authorship; and while they address this nobleman by his proper title, they sign their own names to the dedication. Rarely is fraud or forgery of any kind committed in this open business-like manner. Indeed, they associate with him his brother, the Earl of Montgomery, and by their conduct in each part of the transaction, give an air of truth and honesty to the proceeding.

These indefatigable editors, and, according to Mr. William Henry Smith's statement, egregious liars, endeavoured next to win the confidence and favour of the general public. Having dedicated the work to two noblemen, who were acquainted with its author, and admirers of his unrivalled genius, they seek to establish friendly relations with the reading portion of the community. A kind of preface, "To the great Variety of Readers," couched in these terms, comes next:—

"From the most able, to him that can but spell: There you are number'd. We had rather you were

* Works; edition 1849, vol. i. book i. s. 120, p. 80, &c.

weighd. Especially, when the fate of all Bookes depends upon your capacities: and not of your heads alone, but of your purses. Well! It is now publique, and you wil stand for your priviledges wee know: to read, and censure. Do so, but buy it first. That doth best commend a Booke, the Stationer saies. Then, how odde soever your braines be, or your wisedomes, make your licence the same, and spare not. Judge your sixpen'orth, your shilling's worth, your five shillings' worth at a time, or higher, so you rise to the just rates, and welcome. But, what ever you do, Buy. Censure will not drive a Trade, or make the Jacke go. And though you be a Magistrate of wit, and sit on the Stage at *Black-Friers*, or the *Cock-pit*, to arraigne Playes dailie, know, these Playes have had their triall alreadie, and stood out all Appeales; and do now come forth quitted rather by a Decree of Court, then any purchas'd Letters of commendation.

"It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to have been wished, that the Author himselfe had liv'd to have set forth, and overseen his owne writings; But since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to have collected and publish'd them; and so to have publish'd them, as where [before] you were abus'd with diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors, that expos'd them: even those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them. Who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarse received from him a blot in his papers. But it is not our province, who onely gather his works, and give them you, to praise him. It is yours that reade him. And there we hope, to your divers capacities, you will finde enough,

both to draw, and hold you: for his wit can no more lie hid, then it could be lost. Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him. And so we leave you to other of his Friends, whom if you need, can bee your guides: if you neede them not, you can leade yourselves, and others. And such Readers we wish him.

"JOHN HEMINGE.
"HENRIE CONDELL."

Such is the testimony borne by two men who had acted in his plays, were his associates, in every sense of the term, partners in his pursuits, his emoluments, and his fame; and their evidence must be regarded as conclusive. Are we to suppose that if Bacon had written these dramas, and Shakespeare had been the impostor that Mr. William Henry Smith imagines, these editors, who knew the man well, would have declared, "We have scarce received from him a blot in his papers"? With Shakespeare's handwriting they must have been familiar, and that, at least, Bacon could not imitate. The poet had been dead seven years when the folio edition was published. According to the new theory, Bacon revised these dramas between 1621 and 1623; the manuscript must, therefore, have been in his own handwriting, or in that of the friend or scribe whose assistance he sought; and John Heminge and Henry Condell would not have ventured to assert that they had received Shakespeare's papers, and that they scarcely contained a blot.

Bacon, too, had some regard for the opinion of posterity, some respect for his own fair fame; and had he committed this literary fraud, would not have allowed it to go forth branded as a double deception. It would have been bad enough to deceive the public respecting the authorship of these incomparable works, without adding to the wrong, and aggravating the injustice, by

the assertion, "It had been a thing, we confess, worthy to have been wished, that the author himself had lived to have set forth and overseen his own writings. But since it hath been ordained otherwise, and HE BY DEATH DEPARTED FROM THAT RIGHT, we pray you do not envy his friends, the office of their care and pain, to have collected and published them." Few men could be found bad and degraded enough to have affixed their names to such a wanton desecration of the memory of the dead, to such a gross injustice to the living. That preface forbids the thought that any person but William Shakespeare was the author of those dramas. This portion of the address to the general reader is remarkable; it is fatal to the Baconian theory, fatal to any conceivable theory that would attribute these productions to any conceivable person but William Shakespeare.

The secret, moreover, of William Shakespeare's supposed indifference to fame is also explained. Whilst engaged in his theatrical duties, he did not enjoy leisure or opportunity to superintend the publication of his dramatic works. But in his retirement at Stratford-upon-Avon, he addressed himself to the task; and the consequence was, the collection of the thirty-six plays in the folio, which he bequeathed to mankind as the productions of his mighty mind.

His editors state that the public had been before abused with "diverse stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors that exposed them;" and that they had received the poet's own papers, establishing the Shakespearian canon, and they could assert, without fear of contradiction, "EVEN THOSE ARE NOW OFFERED TO YOUR VIEW CURED, AND PERFECT OF THEIR LIMBS; AND ALL THE REST ABSOLUTE IN THEIR NUMBERS, AS HE CONCEIVED THEM." The men who penned that preface are well known, their assertion was not challenged when there were plenty of persons able to do so, had it been false, and posterity may

receive their testimony without hesitation. It may suit Mr. William Henry Smith's ideas of equity and fair-dealing to declare that William Shakespeare did not write these dramas; but with such evidence as this in our possession, we can smile at his frivolous expedients.

The corrupt state of the text cannot in the least degree prejudice the view we have advocated; for, in the first place, the folio of 1623 was very carelessly edited; and in the second place, our language has undergone many transformations since the days of Elizabeth and the first James; and numerous changes in the outward circumstances of life, manners, and habits, have rendered allusions and sayings obscure, which, at the time of the publication of the first folio, were intelligible enough to the least enlightened of the poet's readers. That the folio of 1623 contains the real text of Shakespeare, few can doubt. That must be our basis to work upon: all else is rottenness. All ideas of new texts and infallible correctors must end in smoke. Every attempt to clear up an obscure passage, or to hit upon the solution of an apparently corrupt reading, merits the warmest commendation; but conjectural emendations must not be received for more than they are worth. The text of 1623 is the rock upon which we take our stand. Self-evident blunders can be, of course, corrected; the various readings of the former quarto editions, whenever such readings are entitled to consideration, can be added in foot-notes, and the more discriminating suggestions of later commentators appended. These form the legitimate materials of foot-notes and illustrations, but they ought, on no account whatever, to be given forth to the world as the words which Shakespeare wrote.

Making due allowance for the blunders that would inevitably occur in a work published ere printing had attained any great degree of excellence, we are constrained to admit that this edition was issued in a very slovenly state. A single fact will prove the assertion. The

name of "John Heminge" is spelt in two ways; and innumerable errors might be, and indeed have been, pointed out.

For the benefit of those who are not yet satisfied that William Shakespeare's claim to the authorship is fully made out, another illustration of the fact is appended. Following close upon the Address to "a great Variety of Readers," comes this commendatory tribute from Ben Jonson's ready and prolific pen :—

"*To the memory of my beloved, the Author,* MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : *and what he hath left us.*

"To draw no envy (Shakespeare) on thy name,
Am I thus ample to thy Booke, and Fame :
While I confesse thy writings to be such,
As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much.
'Tis true, and all men's suffrage. But these wayes
Were not the paths I meant unto thy praise :
For seeliest* Ignorance on these may light,
Which, when it sounds at best, but echoes right ;
Or blinde Affection, which doth ne're advance
The truth, but gropes, and urgeth all by chance ;
Or crafty Malice, might pretend this praise,
And thinke to ruine, where it seem'd to raise.
These are, as some infamous Baud, or Whore,
Should praise a Matron. What could hurt her more ?
But thou art proofe against them, and indeed
Above th' ill fortune of them, or the need.
I, therefore will begin. Soule of the Age !
The applause ! delight ! the wonder of our Stage !
My Shakespeare, rise ; I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lye
A little further, to make thee a roome :
Thou art a Moniment, without a Tombe,
And art alive still, while thy Booke doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.
That I not mixe thee so, my braine excuses ;
I meane with great, but disproportion'd Muses :
For, if I thought my judgement were of yeeres,
I should commit thee surely with thy peeres,

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* *I. e.* most foolish.

And tell, how farre thou didst our Lily out-shine,
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line.
And though thou hadst small Latine, and lesse Greeke,
From thence to honour thee, I would not seeke
For names; but call forth thund'ring Æschilus,
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,
Paccuvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,
To life againe, to heare thy Buskin tread,
And shake a Stage: Or, when thy Sockes were on,
Leave thee alone, for the comparison
Of all, that insolent Greece, or haughtie Rome
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.
Triumph, my Britaine, thou hast one to showe,
To whom all Scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time!
And all the Muses still were in their prime,
When like Apollo he came forth to warme
Our eares, or like a Mercury to charme!
Nature her selfe was proud of his designes,
And joy'd to weare the dressing of his lines!
Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
As, since, she will vouchsafe no other Wit.
The merry Greeke, tart Aristophanes,
Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;
But antiquated, and deserted lye
As they were not of Nature's family.
Yet must I not give Nature all: Thy Art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the Poet's matter, Nature be,
His Art doth give the fashion. And, that he,
Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,
(Such as thine are) and strike the second heat
Upon the Muses' anvile: turne the same,
(And himselfe with it) that he thinkes to frame;
Or for the lawrell, he may gaine a scorne,
For a good Poet's made, as well as borne.
And such wert thou. Looke how the father's face
Lives in his issue, even so, the race
Of Shakespeare's minde, and manners brightly shines
In his well torned,* and true-filed lines:
In each of which, he seems to shake a Lance,
As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance.

---

* *I. e.* turned.

Sweet Swan of Avon! what a sight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appeare,
And make those flights upon the bankes of Thames,
That so did take Eliza, and our James!
But stay, I see thee in the Hemisphere
Advanc'd, and made a Constellation there!
Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,
Or influence, chide or cheere the drooping Stage;
Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourn'd like night,
And despaires day, but for thy Volume's light.

"BEN JONSON."

This constitutes another link in the long chain of positive evidence by which William Shakespeare is proved to be the author of these dramas; and people may rest assured that in any case his fellow-dramatist and colleague, Ben Jonson, knew the whole truth of the matter. With him there could have been no deception; and he was about the last man in the world to have winked at the atrocious literary fraud which Mr. William Henry Smith would have us believe was concocted by Bacon and Shakespeare. In these commendatory verses Jonson speaks of William Shakespeare's genius with the voice of authority. From other sources we learn what wit-encounters occurred between the sturdy rivals, what meetings they had at the Mermaid, and how Shakespeare's life and soul were revealed, as it were, to the eye of his friend. Jonson would not have mentioned Shakespeare as being superior to all poets, both ancient and modern, if he had not felt his manifest superiority, and had something better than mere rumour or idle gossip in support of the opinion. While calling him

"Soul of the age!
The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!"

and placing him above Chaucer, Spenser, Beaumont, Lyly, Kyd, Marlow, Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, and other poets, he does not forget to notice,

"And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek."

Jonson did not aim at extravagance in his eulogium, and he felt that he was uttering sober truth in saying, with reference to Shakespeare,—

> "Triumph, my Britain! thou hast one to show,
> To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe!
> He was not of an age, but for all time!"

And the almost unanimous assent of successive generations, for more than two centuries, has, in a wonderful manner, approved the justice of the tribute.

Such were the seals of authenticity with which the first folio was given to the world. The witnesses who speak to the character and the identity of the poet are of three classes. First, two noblemen, high in honour and authority; secondly, two of the poet's fellow-actors and associates; thirdly, his bosom friend and companion, Ben Jonson. The concurrent testimony of so many witnesses establishes the fact of authorship beyond even the suspicion of a doubt; and we may be sure, that if these men were in error, Mr. William Henry Smith is not the kind of person to set them right. William Shakespeare, and not Francis Bacon, produced these masterpieces: of this fact we possess irrefragable evidence; and it is not only an injustice to the character of the poet, but is also an insult to the English nation, to maintain the contrary; nor do we envy the detractor who voluntarily comes forward to assail the reputations of the two most honoured names in our literature.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TESTIMONY OF RARE BEN JONSON.

"Oh his desert speaks loud; and I should wrong it,
To lock it in the ward of covert bosom,
When it deserves with characters of brass
A forted residence 'gainst the tooth of time
And razure of oblivion."

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

THAT William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were bound together by the holiest ties of friendship, is a fact substantiated in the most satisfactory manner. Shakespeare is even said to have befriended his contemporary, and been a kind of godfather to many of Ben's productions; but, be that as it may, this much is certain, they lived in the closest intimacy, harmony, and companionship. Many anecdotes of their friendship have been preserved; of which none can be more pleasing than the following, introduced by Mr. William J. Thoms, in his "Anecdotes and Traditions, illustrative of Early English History and Literature, derived from MS. sources."*

"SHAKSPEARE'S GIFT TO HIS GOD-CHILD.

"Shake-speare was god-father to one of Ben Jonson's children, and after the christ'ning, being in a deepe study, Jonson came to cheere him up, and ask't him why he was so melancholy? 'No, faith, Ben, (sayes he) not I, but I have been considering a great while what should be the fittest gift for me to bestow upon my god-child, and I have resolv'd at last.' 'I pr'y the, what?' sayes

* Part i. p. 2, No. 3. Published amongst the works of the Camden Society.

he. 'I' faith, Ben, I'le e'en give him a douzen good Lattin Spoones, and thou shalt translate them.' "

For the assistance of the general reader, to whom the meaning of this anecdote may not be perfectly intelligible, the editor adds this explanatory note.

"The MS. from which we are selecting, is the original authority for this anecdote, which we cannot forbear inserting, although we know it has frequently been printed. To omit it would be to destroy the completeness of our selection; and few persons will object to be reminded of so pleasant an illustration of the friendship betwixt the Bard of Avon and rare old Ben. It gives us, as it were, a taste of the combats between the wits of those days, so charmingly described by Beaumont in his letter to Jonson :—

> 'What things have we seen
> Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been
> So nimble and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that every one from whom they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest!'

The practice of giving apostle spoons at christenings has been thus described by Steevens, in a note to Henry VIII., Act v. Sc. 2 :—

"'It was the custom formerly for the sponsors at christenings, to offer gilt spoons as a present to the child. These spoons were called *Apostle spoons*, because the figures of the Apostles were carved on the top of the handles. Such as were at once opulent and generous gave the whole twelve; those who were either more moderately rich or liberal escaped at the expense of the four Evangelists, or even sometimes contented themselves with presenting one spoon only, which exhibited the figure of any saint in honour of whom the child received its name.'

"Shakspeare following this custom, and willing to show his wit, if not his wealth, gave a dozen spoons, not of

silver but of latten ; a name formerly used to signify a mixed metal, resembling brass, as being the most appropriate gift to the child of a father so learned."

In his history of the Worthies of England, Fuller,* speaking of Shakespeare, refers to his intimacy with Ben Jonson, in these terms :—" Many were the wit-combates betwixt him and Ben Johnson, which two I behold like a Spanish great gallion, and an English man-of-war ; Master Johnson, like the former, was built far higher in learning ; solid, but slow in his performances ; Shake-spear, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention."

Having established the fact of their firm friendship, cordial intimacy, and constant intercourse, let us endeavour to ascertain what kind of a man Jonson was; to discover whether he was a person likely to wink at Shakespeare's fraudulent appropriation of the fame of another, or even to allow him to strut in " borrowed plumes." Jonson, it appears, had a marvellous good opinion of himself, and though willing to bow to such a superior mind as he recognized in Shakespeare, was rather inclined to jealousy, and was, moreover, a thorough and an avowed enemy to pretenders of every class and denomination.

In 1619, Ben Jonson went into Scotland, on a visit to Drummond of Hawthornden, who noted down many of Ben's conversations, and appended to these a sketch of the man. Drummond thus describes him :—" He is a great lover and praiser of himself ; a contemner and scorner of others ; given rather to losse a friend than a jest; jealous of every word and action of those about him, (especiallie after drink, which is one of the elements in which he liveth;) a dissembler of ill parts which raigne in him, a

* Published in 1662 (Warwickshire), p. 126.

bragger of some good that he wanteth; thinketh nothing well but what either he himself or some of his friends and countrymen hath said or done; he is passionately kynde and angry; careless either to gaine or keep; vindicative, but, if he be well answered, at himself.

"For any religion, as being versed in both. Interpreteth best sayings and deeds often to the worst. Oppressed with fantaisie, which hath ever mastered his reason, a generall desease in many Poets. His inventions are smooth and easie; but above all he excelleth in a Translation. When his play of a Silent Woman was first acted, ther was found verses after on the stage against him, concluding that that play was well named the Silent Woman, ther was never one man to say Plaudite to it."*

Making due allowance for a little exaggeration, the effect, probably, of wounded pride, we may regard this as a fair sketch of Ben Jonson's character. It cannot be disputed that he was of a jealous temperament.

Drummond, whose Scotch prejudices had received a shock from some jest or biting sarcasm uttered by the poet, may, however, have sketched his faults a little too roughly. Jonson knew Shakespeare thoroughly, had tested both his abilities and his friendship, and being an enemy to all pretenders, would, had Shakespeare not been the author of the dramas that bear his name, instead of penning laudatory verses in honour of his genius, have overwhelmed him with shame and confusion.

It is recorded in these memorable conversations, that Jonson asserted that "Shakespeare wanted art." That he was not blind to his contemporary's faults, nor anxious to spare him, we may learn from what follows :—

"His wit was in his oune power; would the rule of it had beene so too. Many times hee fell into those things,

* Drummond's Notes of Ben Jonson's Conversations, p. 40. Published amongst the works of the Shakespeare Society.

could not escape laughter: As when he saide in the person of *Cæsar*, one speaking to him: *Cæsar thou dost me wrong.* He replied: *Cæsar did never wrong, but with just cause:* and such like, which were ridiculous. But hee redeemed his vices, with his vertues. There was ever more in him to be praysed, then to be pardoned."*

This criticism was uttered some time after Shakespeare's death; and is recorded in his "Timber, or Discoveries," collected at a late period in Ben Jonson's life. It is introduced after the following:—

"I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing, (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out line. My answer hath been, Would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justify mine own candour, for I loved the man, and do honour his memory (on this side idolatry) as much as any. He was (indeed) honest, and of an open, and free nature; had an excellent Phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions: wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped. *Sufflaminandus erat*, as Augustus said of Haterius."

We are approaching the end of this labour of love, and as the proofs accumulate around us, feel almost tempted to ask, whether any sane being can be found who participates in the delusions of the traducer of Shakespeare, whose calumnies have induced us to take up our pen? Was Ben Jonson, and were the poor players also liars and deceivers? Here Jonson asserts in the most solemn manner, while seeking, as he himself confesses, the confidence of posterity, that Shakespeare "WAS INDEED

* Timber, or Discoveries (1641), p. 98.

HONEST, AND OF AN OPEN AND FREE NATURE; HAD AN EXCELLENT PHANTASY, BRAVE NOTIONS, AND GENTLE EXPRESSIONS: WHEREIN HE FLOWED WITH THAT FACILITY, THAT SOMETIMES IT WAS NECESSARY HE SHOULD BE STOPPED."

His honesty, and his open and free nature, would have revolted at the idea of the fraud; his excellent fancy, and his ready wit, were equal to the task of producing all that went forth to the world with the authority of his name.

Jonson, the friend, fellow-dramatist, and constant associate of the poet, who survived him several years, declares, that "Shakespeare was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent fancy, brave notions, and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped;" and in another place, "I loved the man, and do honour his memory (on this side idolatry) as much as any." Mr. William Henry Smith, who knows nothing of the man, and cannot even appreciate his wonderful productions, more than two centuries after he has been dead and buried, declares that he was an arrant impostor, that he did not write the dramas attributed to him, and that his name, instead of being a blessed light, and a beacon on the high-places of literature, is a mere mockery,—a fitful and a treacherous Jack o'Lantern.

Henceforward, we are told, William Shakespeare is to be classed amongst those who have appeared under false colours amongst their fellows. Like a holiday mimicry of fire, by their rapid rise and brilliant glare, such meteors in the intellectual firmament may dazzle for a moment; but if watched and examined, they will prove to be, not planets, shining with a steadfast light, from age to age, but a mere evanescent flame, that glitters for a season, and as suddenly expires. They are the Will-o'-the-Wisps of literature, and instead of guiding men to their quiet and happy homes, lead them among brambles, into bogs and over precipices.

Reader, look upon "this picture and on that." Which

testimony do you deem worthy of credit,—that of the poet's contemporary of the seventeenth, or that of his traducer of the nineteenth century? Ben Jonson's commendations were penned long after both Bacon and Shakespeare had been removed from the busy scenes of life;* when there could consequently have been no necessity for further concealment, and he would have gladly availed himself of the opportunity of unmasking the impostor. But no such task fell to his lot; he knew the real extent of Shakespeare's powers, and fully comprehended his immeasurable superiority. He experienced a sacred delight in assisting to erect a monument to the memory of William Shakespeare, for he entertained a deep and reverential affection for his deceased friend, and was probably aware that the humblest labourer in that pious work would secure renown as the reward of his exertions.

Jonson, with his noble zeal, and his manly, honest love of the poet, had the sagacity to perceive that his friendship with the Bard of Avon would be a surer passport to the grateful remembrance of posterity than the merit of his own dramatic productions, though excellent of their kind. Jonson felt himself safe under the fostering protection of his mighty contemporary; he knew that, hand in hand with Shakespeare, he could bid defiance to the mouldering touch of time; that he should not die as meaner mortals do, whose remembrance is buried with them: and the result has justified his sagacity. By clinging to the skirts of Shakespeare's mantle, he has become a partner in his immortality upon earth; and when men talk of that mighty genius, they make honourable mention of his constant friend, his fellow-dramatist, and his warm admirer—rare Ben Jonson.

* Shakespeare died in 1616; Bacon in 1626; and Jonson in 1637. The latter had been made poet laureate in 1619.

CHAPTER IX.

SHAKESPERIAN CRITICISM.

"It may be regretted, that a large capacity and vigorous imagination are so seldom accompanied by Taste. The tender blossom of fancy faded in the hard pressure of Warburton. He has become his own accuser in the annotation he wrote upon these two lines of Shakspere:—

'And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight;'

a description so rural and easy, that we might have expected it to escape even the predatory pen of a commentator. Hear Warburton:—'I would read thus,—

Do paint the meadows much bedight,

i. e. much *bedecked* and *adorned,* as they are in spring-time.' Yet, if they are much bedight already, they do not require to be painted. The image has two sides. One looks to the eye; the other to the feelings. The emotional appeal is the more affecting. But Warburton runs his pen through it, forgetting how that tuneful friend, whom he delighted to honour, had lashed the conjecturing tribe;—

'Whose unwearied pains
Made Horace dull, and humbled Maro's strains.'

The lovers of Shakspere will hope that the last revision of his works is inflicted. His poetry has been too long the orchard of editors, who leave disastrous proofs of their activity in trunks stripped of ivy, shattered boughs, and trampled enclosures. Some squalid article of intellectual dress, which they call an emendation, sticking among the rich fruit, proclaims the plunderer to have been up in the tree. It happens, indeed, that the sentiment of anger is occasionally softened by a sense of the ridiculous. One adventurer has no sooner packed up his little bundle of pillage, than he is way-laid by a fierce contemporary on the opposite side. Then begin the clamour, the reproach, and the struggle. Pamphlets are hurled; satirical blows are showered; the quarrel waxes furious:

'Collecti flores tunicis cecidere remissis.'

The assertion of Bacon, that the most corrected copies of an author are commonly the least correct, may advantageously be stamped as an introductory motto for every copy of Shakspere."—WILLMOTT, *Pleasures, Objects, and Advantages of Literature,* chap. vii. p. 28.

LITERATURE may be termed the garden or pleasure-grounds of the mind, in which the choicest productions, either for purposes of improvement or recreation, are freely disclosed to all comers. A part of the goodly heritage is devoted to the cultivation of those plants which are used for food, and nourish the mind with knowledge, while the remainder is enriched with blossoms and flowers, intended for ornament and intellectual relaxation. The enchanting domains of literature and the beautiful groves of philosophy and science abound with the choicest treasures that man can possess. Here are varied enjoyments, all perfect in their kind, and of the rarest excellence. On one side, the giant evergreens of history, rejoicing in the freshness of their perennial strength, charm with their verdure, and invite the wanderer to repose beneath their shade. In another portion of this truly happy valley, the fragrant flowers of poesy enrich the air with their choice perfumes. At another bend in the fair scene, the ear is soothed, and the mental vision gratified, by the gently-lapsing streams of narrative and biography meandering among the rich contrasts afforded by various regions and eccentric minds. Here long vistas of philosophy beguile the adventurer into intermingling paths and labyrinthine arbours, where of old the noble Socrates, the gentle Plato, and the princely Bacon, were accustomed to ramble and discourse; while the whole prospect is enlivened by the sunshine of wit, humour, and highly-cultivated imaginations.

Amongst the kingly intellects assembled in this fair domain, our Shakespeare stands pre-eminent. He made a great figure in his own day, being generally recognized

as the master-spirit of his time. Other gifted men were proud to do homage to his superior genius; and "his art was of such power," that even mighty sovereigns acknowledged its influence. The "Merry Wives of Windsor," as Dennis tells us, was written at the command of Queen Elizabeth.* "I knew very well," he says, speaking of this comedy, "that it had pleased one of the greatest queens that ever was in the world, great not only for her wisdom in the arts of government, but for her knowledge of polite learning, and her nice taste of the drama, for such a taste we may be sure she had, by the relish which she had of the ancients. This comedy was written at her command, and by her direction, and she was so eager to see it acted, that she commanded it to be finished in fourteen days, and was afterwards, as tradition tells us, very well pleased at the representation." Rowe, in 1709, repeats the story, and asserts that "Elizabeth was so well pleased with that admirable character of Falstaff, in the two parts of Henry IV., that she commanded him to continue it for one play more, and to show him in love: this is said to be the occasion of his writing the Merry Wives of Windsor." A year later Gildon confirms these traditions.

One fragment from the account of the revels in the reign of James I., discovered by Mr. P. Cunningham at the Audit Office, shows the popularity of Shakespeare in his own day; and as a proof how, even in contemporary historical documents of undoubted authenticity, his name was connected with the authorship of the plays, a copy of this interesting paper is annexed.

* Comical Gallant, or the Amours of Sir John Falstaff (1702). The Epistle dedicatory.

The Plaiers.	1605.	*The Poets which mayd the plaies.*
By the Kings Ma^tis plaiers.	Hallamas Day being the first of Novembar, A play in the Banketinge House att Whithall called the Moor of Venis. [Nov. 1st, 1604.]	
By his Ma^tis plaiers.	The Sunday ffollowinge, a play of the Merry Wives of Winsor. [Nov. 4th, 1604.]	
,,	On St. Stivens night in the hall a play called Mesur for Mesur. [Dec. 26th, 1604.]	Shaxberd.
,,	On Inosents Night the Plaie of Errors. [Dec. 28th, 1604.]	Shaxberd.
,,	Betwin Newers day and Twelfe day a play of Loves Labours Lost. [1605.]	
,,	On the 7 of January was played the play of Henry the fift. [1605.]	
,,	On Shrovsunday a play of the Martchant of Venis. [Mar. 24th, 1605.]	Shaxberd.
,,	On Shrovtusday a play cauled the Martchant of Venis againe commanded by the Kings Matie [26 Mar. 1605.]	Shaxberd.
	[Accounts from Oct. 31st, 1611, to Nov. 1st, 1612.]	
By the Kings players.	Hallomas nyght was presented att Whithall before the Kinges Matie a play called the Tempest. [Nov. 1st, 1611.]	
The Kings players.	The 5th of November : A play called the Winters Nightes Tayle. [1611.]	

From these notices it is evident enough, that early in the seventeenth century Shakespeare was the sole dramatist popular at court. It is true that his popularity soon after suffered a decline,—that the glory of the drama was temporarily obscured; and when a revival ensued, false notions respecting both his works and his life prevailed; but this is the first time that anything like a determined and deliberate attempt has been made to brand him as an arrant impostor.

The current of Shakesperian criticism during the last century was neither worthy of the poet nor honourable to our literature. The various commentators and editors of that period may be said to have tolerated rather than to have admired or comprehended Shakespeare. Eager to discover blemishes, they scarcely noticed his beauties; intent upon finding out his weakness, they never paused to consider what a giant he was when he put forth all his strength. Even Samuel Johnson, with his fervent love of what was truthful and good, and his manly detestation of quackery and tinsel, betrayed something like presumption in his way of treating Shakespeare, and can scarcely be said to have fathomed the depths of his mighty genius.

Without going further into details, we may select his criticisms upon the "Midsummer Night's Dream," and "Twelfth Night, or What you Will," as illustrations of this fact. He sneered at the former, as being "wild and fantastical," and declared that the latter exhibits no "just picture of life."

Wild and fantastical, indeed, is that lovely "Midsummer Night's Dream," which unfolds before one,

> "Like the sweet south
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour."

How fair, too, are the scenes to which, like an enchantress, this comedy transports our minds! How soft the skies, how balmy the air, how fragrant the perfume! and who can forget the gentle trip of the fairies that

flit before one like the soft hues of twilight! Do not the accents of love, passionate, melancholy, and tender, linger in our ears, like a half-remembered melody? Can we be insensible to the rustic humour of the clowns, and the glorious consummation of the entire performance? Wild and fantastical it may be; but the wildness and the fantasy are above all human effort; and we can only pity those upon whose minds these manifold beauties produce no agreeable impression.

In "Twelfth Night," do we find "no just picture of life"? Is it not one grand picture of human life, made up of pleasant scenes, set like choice miniatures, in the ample canvas of the complete work? as thousands of stars, and the moon progressing in glory through the blue expanse of the firmament, and the fantastic clouds, looking down upon the grove and the forest, the meadow and the cornfield, the mountain and the valley, reflecting their beauty and their brightness, in a world of streams, in the calm bosom of the waveless lake, and in the rugged breast of the expanded ocean, are all of them small, yet perfect accessories, grouped together in rich profusion, to form the magnificent picture of a summer's night. Is it not all life, all nature, all reality? So much so, indeed, that we are almost tempted to yield to the influence of the softer passion, with Olivia, Viola, and the Duke; are ready to quaff with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew; to plot innocent stratagems with Maria; to laugh, philosophize, and make merry with the Clown?

Shakespeare was poetry itself; the stream flowed from him naturally, as from a fountain. He is truly the oracle of Nature; and this "Twelfth Night" may be regarded as one of his sublimest interpretations. To those who have been in the South, the perusal of those plays of Shakespeare in which the scene is laid in that sunny clime, seems to bring the whole country, as if by enchantment, before the mind. The same dark-eyed and sylph-like damsels smile; the same careless and exuberant

beings make love, and pass the time in gentle dalliance; the same glorious sun shines; the same quiet landscapes, prodigal of abundance, reveal their richness; and the same large-souled Nature, if we may apply the term, appears in all. And "Twelfth Night" tells of such a clime. In reading it, we are led through gardens, bowers, and streets, where the busy hand of restless occupation does not forbid sweet converse. So unlike our own land, yet so like those climes in which the present hour is looked upon as the sole treasure. There life does not, like the great philosophy of the master mind,

"Look both before and after."

Bulwer Lytton says, in "King Arthur,"

"Life may have holier ends than happiness."

It would be a dangerous thing to preach this to those gay children of the South. Could they receive the doctrine? Could they be induced to look beyond the present hour? Perchance they might. Perhaps, under all the levity of outward appearance,—this sunshine of existence,—a latent current flows strong within.

Our own sweet Shakespeare has made the Clown (no mean philosopher) ask the question, "What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl?" The oppressed answers, and adds,

"I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion."

And what is the Clown's reply? Is it not a commentary upon the present condition of the inhabitants of that clime?—"Remain thou still in darkness: thou shalt hold the opinion of Pythagoras, ere I will allow of thy wits."

Gentle Reader, "for," in the words of Southey, "if thou art fond of such works as these, thou art like to be the Gentleman and the Scholar,"—is it not so now? Does not the spiritual and temporal despot demand

implicit obedience to doctrines almost as pernicious as those of Pythagoras; and does he not keep the people bound in an iron and hopeless tyranny? Do they not remain in darkness still? Does not something worse than folly reign, and are not all ranks oppressed beneath it? Are not these scenes, then, living pictures, speaking to our inmost souls?

Thus were the perfect productions of Shakespeare criticised by those who might have been expected to approach the contemplation of them in a reverential spirit. That species of criticism has, however, been replaced by something more worthy of the poet, and more honourable to the critic. We had triumphed over the deer-story, the poverty, the imperfect education, and a thousand minor matters relating to the career of the man and the works of the poet, when up springs Mr. William Henry Smith with his new theory.

We have shown by infallible proofs, that it is altogether untenable. Not only is it contrary to all our knowledge and experience; it is decidedly the opposite of what we might expect. The inconsistencies of the whole story, apart from the evidence against it, are monstrous. The imperfect education of Shakespeare has formed the subject for the keenest attacks of the critics, and these dramas of the poor and ignorant player are at length assigned to the most learned man of the age! Shakespeare has been derided for his assumed ignorance of Latin and Greek; now we are told that these dramas were composed by one of the best classical scholars of the Elizabethan period. Moreover, if Bacon superintended the publication of these works, how are we to account for the slovenly manner in which they issued from the press? Even had he been unable to attend to the actual correction of the sheets at the time of publication, he lived three years after the first folio appeared, and could, of course, have inserted corrections in the margin, which might have been used for the second

impression. Why did he lay down his pen at Shakespeare's death, whom he survived ten years? All the dramas which are even attributed to Shakespeare are known to have been in existence previous to 1616. We cannot suppose that, having written thirty-six such plays before that date, Bacon would not have penned another line of blank verse, nor have left a scrap of that kind of composition amongst his papers. The story, from beginning to end, is almost too absurd to be dealt with seriously.

No two minds could be more dissimilar than those of Bacon and Shakespeare; they were both monarchs in the realms of literature, but they sat upon different thrones: theirs was not a joint sovereignty; they ruled over separate empires. Shakespeare possessed great natural genius; Bacon's mind was a store-house of learning. The one had power to create, the other to mould all human knowledge to his mighty will. Bacon was a dictator amongst philosophers and schoolmen; Shakespeare, a king amongst poets. The one dived deep beneath the surface, and brought up rich pearls of thought; the other plucked the flowers as he passed along; received his inspiration direct from all-bounteous Nature; and held mysterious communion with her.

Bacon's fine reasoning powers, his rich and varied acquisitions of learning, his firm grasp of thought, all assisted to render him one of the mightiest beings that ever appeared upon earth. Yet his was not intuitive wisdom; he accumulated rich stores, and extracted their essence; he fed upon the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and waxed strong. What a prince he was amongst philosophers! Yet how unlike our

> "Sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child,
> Warbling his native wood-notes wild."

In all the treasures Bacon amassed for posterity, we do not find a trace of the magic power that holds us

spell-bound in the antechamber of Macbeth's castle, or draws tears from our eyes, when we read of Ophelia's sad fate in "the weeping brook."

Our great dramatist died at a comparatively early age, yet in what a blaze of splendour did his sun go down! What glorious treasures did he bequeath to mankind! What a priceless legacy to posterity! What acquisitions for the literature of this country, rich as it was at that period! "King Lear," "Troilus and Cressida," "The Tempest," and "The Winter's Tale," were amongst the latest of his productions; not to mention "Henry the Eighth," with the completion of which he probably laid down his pen. His genius was lofty and commanding, but nature and men, not books, were the works that he studied. He felt that no two human beings are alike, and when he wanted a character, he knew where to find one. He did not need books, for he looked into man. From the busy and unheeding throng, he selected his imperishable types, and he handled them with the same facility that the showman does his puppets. He had a deep insight into objective and subjective (if the terms may be thus applied) nature. He had anatomized man's heart, and was thoroughly acquainted with its numerous complications. He saw the world around him, under the sunbeam; and the light of his genius shed its rays upon the inner world of passion and impulse, and penetrated its every mystery.

And thus amongst the kings of literature he fills the highest throne. The glory of his fame did not burst upon the world like a brilliant meteor, dazzling for a moment, and as suddenly disappearing; it has advanced steadily towards its meridian, and is now the brightest planet in the firmament of English literature. It may, indeed, be termed the centre of the system; for around it all the lesser lights revolve, illumined by the effulgence of its surpassing splendours.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

"'Tis slander,—
Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue
Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath
Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie
All corners of the world,—kings, queens, and states,
Maids, matrons,—nay, THE SECRETS OF THE GRAVE
This viperous slander enters."

CYMBELINE.

OUR labour of love draws near its termination, and we entertain but slight apprehension lest our toil should be lost; for seldom indeed is any historical fact capable of illustration by such overwhelming evidence. The bard of Stratford-upon-Avon bears his literary honours thick around his venerable brow. If William Shakespeare's title to the authorship of the six-and-thirty plays of the folio of 1623 cannot be considered as fully substantiated, we may at once bid farewell to our elder classics, and open the flood-gates to the most terrible deluge of incredulity and doubt that ever spread desolation over the literature of any country.

In a former chapter we promised to adduce proofs—incontestable proofs—sufficient to convince any reasonable inquirer that Shakespeare's claim to be regarded as the author of the dramas that bear his name is unquestionable. It is clear and precise; a fact, indeed, established as completely as any in our literary annals, and one which does not therefore admit of the slightest doubt. This pledge has, we believe, been redeemed; and if in our vindication we have spoken with warmth and indignation, it is because we feel, and feel strongly, that this charge ought never to have been put in circulation. We

regard it both as a degradation and a disgrace to the literature of the day, being nothing less than an attempt to destroy the good name of the greatest poet the world ever saw.

The truth is, that an irreverent spirit has got abroad; and a certain class of writers deem nothing sacred from assault. Reference has already been made to the manner in which this predatory warfare is generally conducted, and but few authors of merit have escaped the unwarrantable attacks of some of these critical hornets. Only a short time since Sir Walter Scott's memory was wantonly assailed, and most triumphantly vindicated.* Yet, had the fray been postponed until those able to speak with certainty in the great novelist's defence were removed from the scene, the author of the "Waverley Novels" might have suffered therefrom in general esteem.

Had Mr. William Henry Smith, in his profound wisdom and extended philosophy, thought fit to challenge the almost unanimous verdict of mankind respecting the merits of Shakespeare's plays; had he declared that he deemed these much overrated, and that he could by no means allow them to be such masterpieces as certain critics chose to represent, nobody would have complained. Mr. William Henry Smith possesses as much right to cavil as others to praise; and might even publish such opinions in any form that he deemed most expedient. There is no act of parliament in existence to prevent men from making absurd exhibitions of themselves; nor can those that have a fancy for the thing be hindered from taking up a position on the great high-roads of literature, arrayed in a gaudy fool's cap of their own construction. He would not be the only delinquent that has carried his own rod to the place of punishment; nor the first to discover that the hardest blows are generally those inflicted by the whip that folly places in one's own hands.

These and other absurdities Mr. William Henry Smith

* See Notes and Queries, 1st Series, vol. xii.

might have perpetrated without giving offence to any save himself; but the private character of William Shakespeare, as well as that of Francis Bacon, ought not to be used as a target for his roving bolts. The reputation of these great men, that have now been in their graves for more than two centuries, forms one of the richest treasures of the commonwealth; and those who dare to cast a slur upon it must be dealt with as offenders against decency and common sense. Had such an accusation been brought against Shakespeare during his lifetime, in the courts of law, he would have found means for vindicating his character and chastising the aggressor. Were any person to hazard the assertion that Earl Stanhope had not penned one line of the "History of England," published with his name, at the same time adding that it had been written by Mr. Hallam, the noble author would be able to punish his traducer through the agency of the legal institutions of the land. We can well fancy how a jury would treat a culprit who pleaded in justification, that, in the first place, Lord Stanhope was unequal to the task of historical composition; that, secondly, Mr. Hallam had not noticed Lord Stanhope in his works, nor Lord Stanhope Mr. Hallam; and, therefore, thirdly, the last-mentioned gentleman must be the author of the history in question.

This is precisely the course that has been adopted by Mr. William Henry Smith with reference to Shakespeare; and if the living author has a protection against such scandalous attacks, why should the dead be left exposed to all their bitterness? It is for this reason that we call upon the English people to become the defenders of Shakespeare and Bacon. We appeal to that love of justice and fair play which has long been a distinguishing characteristic of the nation, convinced that it is high time to put a stop, at once and for ever, to these outrages upon the memories of the mighty dead, these unseemly exhibitions that cause so much scandal.

Were the matter properly taken up, meetings would be summoned, and a memorial prepared, containing a forcible expression of the indignation of the English people at this wanton attempt to fix a stain of deepest dye upon the fair fame of Francis Bacon and William Shakespeare. Much good might be achieved by the publication of such a memorial in the newspapers and periodicals of the day. The example would serve as a salutary warning to discontented critics, and for the future deter them from attacking private character; whilst we feel assured that any expense might be defrayed by a penny subscription, to which thousands of all classes would joyfully contribute.

Another, and perhaps even a better plan, would be to gibbet the offender. We inscribe the names of public benefactors and philanthropists in gilt letters upon marble monuments in churches and public edifices, why not adopt a similar system in dealing with delinquents of this description? If they voluntarily become scarecrows, they cannot grumble at being nailed, with outstretched wings, in some place of general resort. The new reading-room of the British Museum seems to be the proper arena for the punishment of those who offer violence to our great literary heroes. Let a large black board be erected in this new temple of learning, on which the names of all those condemned by a fairly-constituted jury, of wanton and wicked assaults upon the reputations of the illustrious dead, and other literary misdemeanours, may be inscribed. We doubt not that first and foremost upon the list will appear the name of William Henry Smith, found guilty of traducing the characters of Bacon and Shakespeare.

THE END.

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